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TRAVELER

December 2014/January 2015

ANNUAL
GUIDE

Best of the World

*20 Places
You Should See
in 2015*

ROAD TRIP
**THE
ORIGINAL
WELLNESS
TRAIL**

GOING LOCAL
**HANDMADE
IN PHILLY**

MY CITY
**COOL GRIT:
MEXICO'S
CULTURE
CAPITAL**

DRINK
**STOUT
CRAWL IN
IRELAND**

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**CHICAGO'S
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INSIDE: THE NEXT MACHU PICCHU, GREETINGS FROM PENANG, OAKLAND REDUX



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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER

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■ ON THE COVER: CORSICA'S CLIFFS ALONG THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA, BY CLAUDIO CASSARO/SIME
■ ABOVE: THE FELTENS, FROM "THE ROAD TO WELLVILLE," IN PHOENIX, ARIZONA (1936)



Ripe for discovery,
Lake Ohrid straddles
Albania and Macedonia.

The Far Edge of Travel

WE DRIVE INTO the Ceraunian Mountains of Albania on a switchback-happy coastal road, past walls of black pines and by rickety tables laden with local honey and tea. Slopes spilling down to beaches yield, in season, lemons, oranges, olives. The Ionian Sea shimmers blue to our right, with Corfu visible in the haze. “These are my mountains, the Thunder Mountains,” my guide, Adrian, says. “I grew up here. They are in my blood.”

Adrian points out a pass below through which Julius Caesar in 48 B.C. led his legions against Pompey. Then he talks of the thousands of Albanians who fled a communist rule that ended in 1992—and says many are coming home. “My grandmother calls this the land of stone and clouds. The stones are those who came back, who are rooted to the earth. The clouds wander, seeking a place to settle.” We rumble in a 4x4 on gravel roads through olive groves to Pilur, a village where, under a chestnut tree, elders burst into impromptu polyphony, a UNESCO-recognized blend of musical voices that dates back more than a thousand years. Then

we dine alfresco on local figs, plums, eggs, *petulla* (fried dough), tart goat cheese, and sausage, washed down with home-brewed rakija and wine out of soda bottles.

Travelers have largely overlooked the Balkan region, which has long been shrouded by a troubled past. But its enigmatic nature may prove to be its most potent drawing card. We’ve seen this happen elsewhere: Papua New Guinea, Myanmar, Bhutan. In these pages, writer Mark Jenkins tells a story of remoteness (in China’s Altay Mountains) and cultural adventure (on a horse-drawn *chana* expedition). It may seem a vicarious glimpse of a far-off land. Yet, as with Albania, it may soon be within reach.

I’m looking forward to exploring other far-off lands myself as I leave the magazine I have edited for 17 years. My plans include writing more and spearheading exciting efforts to promote travel as a learning tool—for I believe the passport is the new diploma. Here’s to future journeys.

— KEITH BELLOWS

Travelers have largely overlooked the Balkan region, long shrouded by a troubled past. But its enigmatic nature may prove to be its most potent drawing card.

OUR MISSION

At *National Geographic Traveler*, we aim to inspire curious travelers to see and preserve our world; help readers journey wisely and well; share travel experiences and cultural insights that can change us; and bring to our pages the emotional and photographic power of travel.

Canon



WHEN INSPIRATION STRIKES, STRIKE FASTER.

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SCRAPBOOK

Our Favorite Things

What do staffers bring back from their travels? Here's a peek into our baggage. Plus, we've created a special gift guide—available online and on our iPad edition—to help you search for your own authentic treasures from abroad.



TURNING HEADS

"After finding this bronze Buddha head at a tiny shop in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, I loaded it into my backpack and carried it around for another month before arriving home."
—Susan O'Keefe, associate editor



FLIGHTS OF FANCY

"Designed by Finnish glass artist Oiva Toikka and handcrafted in Nuutajärvi, Finland, this guillemot caught my eye in a Helsinki airport gift shop."
—Carol Enquist, senior photo editor

SQUARE ROOT

"Wowed by the tile work on fountains throughout Barcelona, I purchased these hand-painted tiles while wandering the city's Gothic Quarter."
—Jerry Sealy, creative director



OLD WIVES' TALE

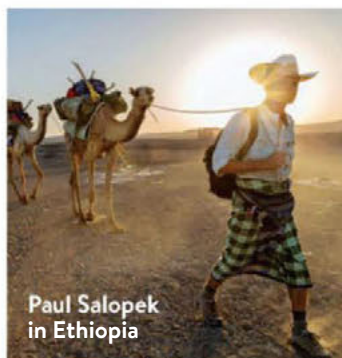
"In Latvian folklore, the ring's pendants each symbolize an admirer—a woman married the man whose pendant fell off first. I couldn't resist the ring's romantic story."
—Amy Alipio, associate editor

GETAWAYS

TRAVEL WITH US

Like what you see in our "Best of the World" feature (page 36)? Explore unforgettable destinations—such as Haida Gwaii, British Columbia; Zermatt, Switzerland; and Koyasan, Japan—beyond the pages through curated trips led by area experts from National Geographic Expeditions.

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Paul Salopek in Ethiopia

WALKABOUT

HEART AND SOLES

Journalist and National Geographic Fellow Paul Salopek has some 60,000-year-old shoes to fill. Now a year into his seven-year journey, Salopek plans to cover 21,000 miles and four continents by 2020 on the same path trod by our *Homo sapiens* ancestors. Traveling on foot, he'll trace human migration from Ethiopia's Great Rift Valley to Tierra del Fuego, Chile.

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MONTANA | It's time.

STAR TRAILS OVER LAKE MCDONALD IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK
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"It's Going to be a Great Day."

Waking Up in America's Best Ski Town: Whitefish, MT.

In some places, winter is endured. Others meet it with a proud toughness. But in a few very special parts of the world, winter is anticipated—embraced and squeezed for all the enjoyment it will bring. Here, skiers aren't the only ones with a twinkle in their eye on the eve of a big snow.

You might arrive after nightfall, on a flight into Glacier Park International Airport. You'll see the groomers at work as you head into town, their headlights teasing the shape of Whitefish Mountain Resort's peak above town. You'll check in, settle down, and fall asleep cuddling a trail map, with the snow report open on your iPad.

You've done your research, of course. You've read stories and reviews about this authentic ski town still reachable by train. You've seen photos of Glacier National Park, somehow even more impressive dressed in white. You've watched videos about the 3,000-plus acres of Rocky Mountain skiing.

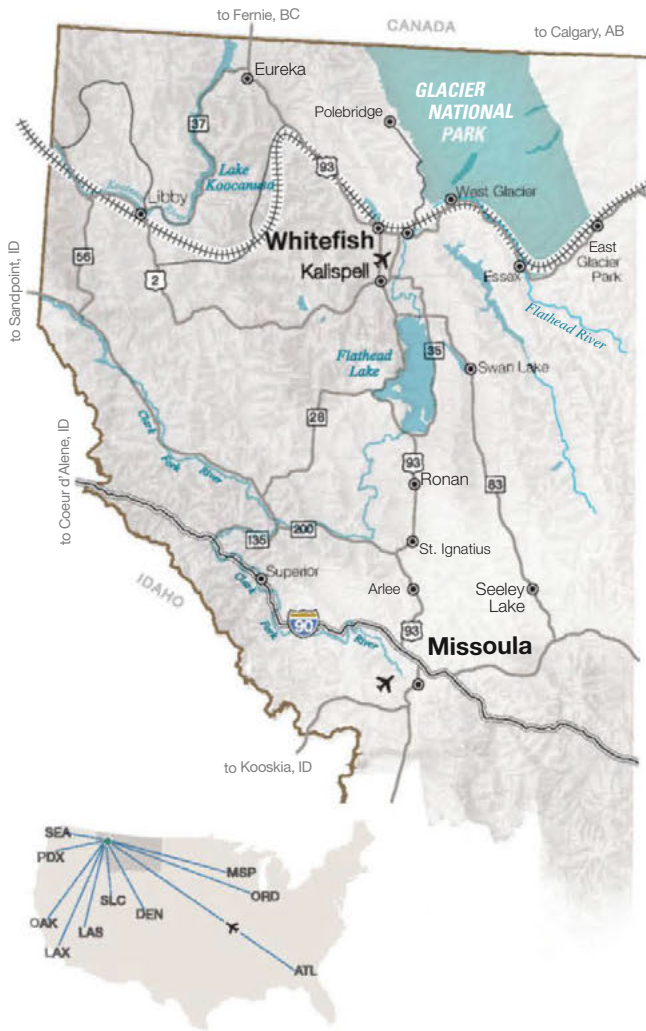
But when you wake up and open the door, you'll still be surprised. Against all odds, you'll find that Central Avenue really is that charming. You'll wonder if it's just in your head, or if the snow is sparkling more brightly here.

And that will get you thinking about the other things you've heard. Will the lift lines really be as short as people say? Will Glacier be as jaw-dropping as the snowshoe tour guide made it sound? Can it be possible that one little town could have so many restaurants worth trying?

"What are you thinking about?" your travel companions will ask. You'll realize you were daydreaming, and respond with the only words you can find.

"It's going to be a great day."

For more on winter in Whitefish, Montana, visit ExploreWhitefish.com.



Top left: Downtown Whitefish, MT

Top right: Cross-country skiing in Glacier National Park

Bottom: Catching air at Whitefish Mountain Resort





MONTANA | It's time.

NAVIGATING THE GLOBE

SMART TRAVELER

A proper lunch in
Copenhagen: open-faced
sandwiches and lager
PAGE 24



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A casual restaurant in the Colonia Roma neighborhood

MY CITY

Mexico City Mix

Intimacy and grit in the Mexican capital BY FRANCISCO GOLDMAN

I'D NEVER MISSED Mexico City so much as during this past interminable winter in New York. During the weeks before our departure date, I badly needed a haircut, but I didn't get one because on my first day in the D.F.—the Distrito Federal, as locals call Mexico City—I wanted to go to my favorite barbershop, and maybe you should go too, for an authentic Mexican experience. Paris Marínne, in posh Polanco, is a humble place with a barber pole outside. Inside are old-fashioned barber chairs, usually filled with executive types. As soon as you come in, you're offered a drink—tequila or whiskey—which they'll keep refilling as long as you're there. If you stay for a shave, that can be a couple of hours. Men lie back, faces covered with steaming towels, which

are repeatedly changed. My barber is Francisco, and when my girlfriend and I were temporarily broken up, he gave me advice that was the opposite of my New York shrink's, for whom mental health meant accepting that some things have no solution. Francisco said that everything has a solution, and he turned out to be right.

After that most recent haircut, as I was in the neighborhood, I went to the José Cuervo Salón for the Saturday night fights. Half a century ago in the U.S., nationally televised Friday night fights were an institution, but the rougher mainstream culture that implies is long gone. These fights are nationally televised too. The arenas are small—the grungy old Arena México in Colonia Doctores is my favorite—and you

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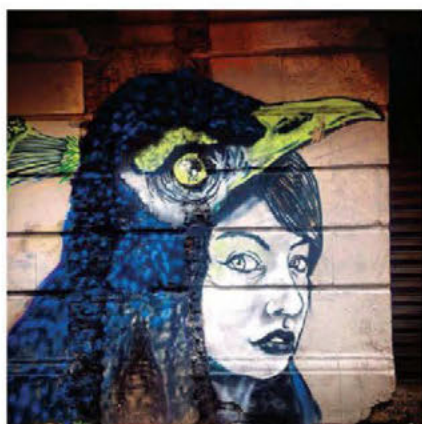
can hear every punch land, and study the fighters' eyes. You feel as if you are in a George Bellows painting. Mexican boxers, whatever their skill level, have long had an international reputation as fighters who won't go down, who give it their absolute all. The Saturday night fights represent one of the things I love most about Mexico City: the way it preserves—for all the sophistication, wealth, and glamour of its most fashionable sectors—the hard-nosed grittiness of city life in a way that is never easy to overlook.

The other day I ran into a friend at Panadería Rosetta, a single-counter place, in the Colonia Roma Norte neighborhood, selling sandwiches and chocolate croissants that I'm dangerously addicted to. Its owner/chef, Elena Reygadas, was recently awarded the Veuve Clicquot Latin America's Best Female Chef 2014, for her more upscale restaurant, Rosetta, down the block. At the Panadería, I was having a melted *stracchino* and arugula sandwich for lunch, and my friend was

day of the week but especially on Sundays, in Parque México, in the Condesa neighborhood; or a teeming food market such as Mercado San Juan, with its geometric piles of brilliantly colored fruits, some of which you'll never have heard of, and free samples, which hawkers constantly hand out.

I could write a 500-page book of suggested walks through the D.F. (In Roberto Bolaño's *Savage Detectives*, a novel that captures the spirit of life in this city as no other does, the young characters walk endlessly.) But one of my favorite walks meanders from Roma Norte to Roma Sur. It doesn't matter what tree-shaded streets I go down—I might stop for lunch at Parnita, that most excellent taco restaurant—but I end up at Lulu, an art space founded by the Mexican artist Martin Soto Climent and the American curator Chris Sharp (make an appointment by e-mail).

The D.F. may have several comprehensive contemporary art museums, including the Fundación Jumex, founded by the



A concentration of art: a mural (left) decorating Okupa bar in Colonia Roma; visitors at Museo Jumex (center) enjoying the terrace view of the silvery-tiled Museo Soumaya; a colorful jumble of chili peppers at organic market Mercado el 100 (right)

taking photos for his blog. Later, he and I were walking down Calle Orizaba, past the pool-hall bar that serves good cheap pizza and top-notch mescals, when he exclaimed, "Aren't we lucky to live in Mexico City!"

You can eat sandwiches in New York City, too, but I emphatically agreed. I never feel especially grateful to live in New York, not in the way I do to live in the D.F.

I looked around. An endless stream of young people and sophisticated arty older people—this area has many galleries—passed us by. Magnificent trees bower Roma Norte's streets, which are lined with faded grand 19th-century mansions from when this was the "aristocratic" neighborhood. Roma can feel like a neighborhood out of Proust, except for the food stands on the corners, such as the one serving a traditional Mexican goat stew, or birria, with tacos, good for hangovers. No birria in Proust.

My late wife, Aura, loved flying into the city at night, seeing the vast, dense spread of lights below. "It's like looking down into the universe from above," she'd say. The keys to happiness in this city, I think, are the simple things: the cozy cantina that serves pork ribs in green sauce; a walk, on any

scion of Mexico's mega juice company. But Lulu, named after a little juice stand on the corner, is just one white room on the ground floor of a small house.

Over the past year Lulu has shown internationally renowned artists, from the Mexican, Brooklyn-based painter Aliza Nisenbaum to New Zealander Kate Newby. As part of her exhibit, Newby poured a puddle of pink-colored cement outside on the gallery's sidewalk and embedded into it small crustacean "fossils" that she had sculpted by hand. The neighbors were so fond of the work they swept it every morning. Inside the gallery, a row of exquisite tiny handmade bells dangled by red threads from a thin cord. The cord led visitors to a sort of hanging xylophone of ceramic blades, in different colors, which made stirring sounds when nudged against one another. Here in one of the largest, most chaotic cities on Earth, enchantment and delight on the most intimate scale.

FRANCISCO GOLDMAN is the author of the award-winning *Say Her Name* and *The Interior Circuit: A Mexico City Chronicle*. He lives in Mexico City and teaches a semester every year at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.



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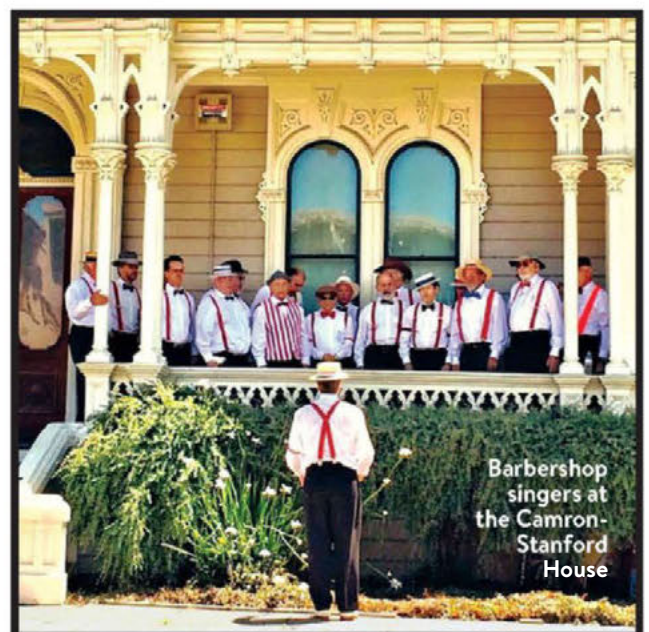


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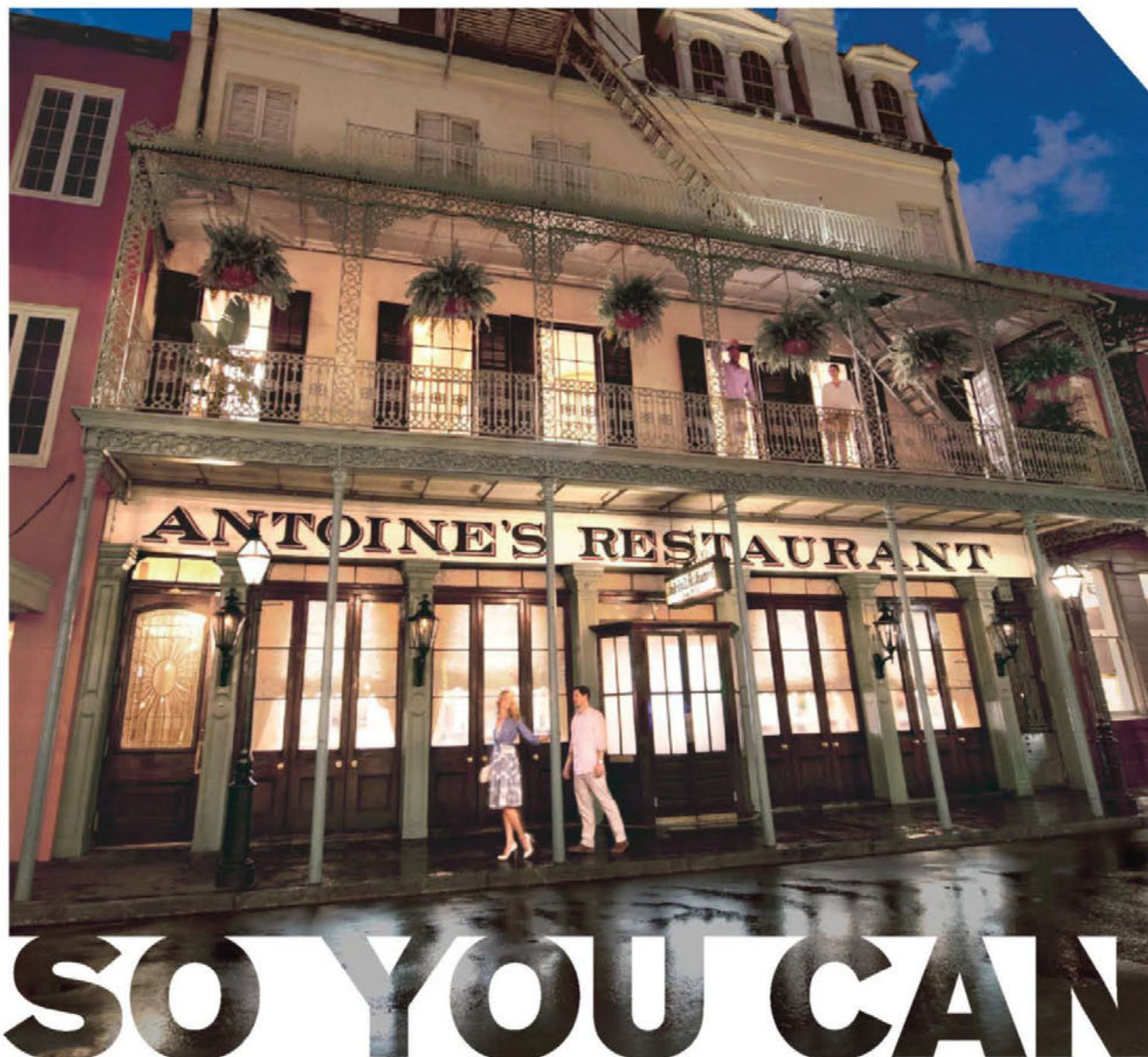
AN “A” FOR OAKLAND

OAKLAND IS ENJOYING a moment. New residents, attracted to this California city by low rents and ethnic diversity, have bolstered a stream of shops and eateries, including Wood Tavern, known for its pork belly and desserts, and Italian hot spot Pizzaiolo, a best bet for breakfast (spicy cheese croissants, scones). Wineries such as Cerruti Cellars have taken over abandoned spaces, giving the lie, Oaklander Nina Newhouse says, to “the notion that the only way to make fantastic wine is to live in a vineyard.” And an eclectic mix of jewel-box-size boutiques, along with the popular old-style Temescal Alley Barbershop, has everyone flocking to Temescal Alley, where streetcars once ran. —Annie Fitzsimmons

■ FOR MORE FROM ANNIE FITZSIMMONS, OUR URBAN INSIDER, VISIT OUR INTELLIGENT TRAVEL BLOG.



NORIE QUINTOS (THEATER SINGERS), CATHERINE KARNOW (BARBERSHOP, PIZZA)



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STRANGE PLANET

Weird but True Around the World

1. Sticky Situation: Thousands of pieces of chewed gum line 70-foot-long Bubblegum Alley in San Luis Obispo, California.
2. Bald Dogs: A worker rubs sunscreen daily on some 12 Mexican hairless dogs roaming the grounds of the Dolores Olmedo Museum in Mexico City.
3. View the Loo: Water cascades from 10,000 toilet urinals and seats, creating an art installation in Foshan, Guangdong Province, China.

STREET SCENE

BEAR ESSENTIALS ON PORTOBELLO

In December, London's most lovable bear, Paddington, hits big screens across the globe. To celebrate in England's capital, retrace the teddy's wellie-wearing footsteps to Portobello Market. Paddington—the protagonist of the children's storybook series that started in 1958—came here to visit his friend's shop, where they enjoyed elevenses (tea, served with cake), and to pick up fruits and vegetables. For more timeless treasures, visit weekends, when antiques vendors set up stalls. Skip the kitschy Will and Kate tea towels and head to the pastel-painted terraces around the Vernon arcade, where sharp eyes can find pocket watches, porcelain, and rare jewelry. Browse through time via *Barbarella* dresses, aging coin collections, and wiry tongue scrapers from when flushed pink palates were the height of sophistication.

—Abigail King



Antiques at a London market



TRENDING

Eating the Enemy

By COSTAS CHRIST

ASIAN CARP CLOGGING Mississippi waterways. Lionfish destroying Caribbean reefs. Burmese pythons devouring the Everglades' wildlife. Wild boars gorging on endangered sea turtle eggs. These and other invasive species are wreaking havoc on fragile natural ecosystems. In response, a culinary movement spearheaded by conservation groups and sustainably minded chefs is gathering steam, with a clear message: Eat the invaders.

Invasive species have debuted at novelty dinners. Last spring the Georgia chapter of the Society of Conservation Biology announced an Invasive Species Hog Roast. The Fertile Earth Foundation held a Miami gala that included smoked python and adobo-rubbed snakehead fish. But they're also showing up on more restaurant menus. I recently dined on grilled lionfish at Francis Coppola's Turtle Inn resort in Belize. And at California's Post Ranch Inn, chef John Cox served diced moon jellyfish with lemon and ginger. Miya's Sushi in New Haven, Connecticut, has developed an expanding menu of invasives, including the Asian shore crab (above), one of the most destructive species on the New England coast.

Can we beat back these biological menaces that threaten the survival of native species? Some scientists think the problem is too big to eat our way out of. Perhaps, but given the human appetite for consuming creatures to near extinction (think bluefin tuna), I think we can take a big bite out of the problem.

■ FOLLOW COSTAS ON TWITTER @COSTASCHRIST.

ANDREW HETHERINGTON (CRAB), TRISTAN DESCHAMPS/ALAMY (SUITCASES), JOE BELANGER/ISTOCKPHOTO (BUBBLEGUM)

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ON TAP

SHEDDING LIGHT ON IRISH STOUT

“There’s a lot more to the Irish stout than what’s offered in a pint of Guinness,” says *The World Atlas of Beer* co-author Stephen Beaumont. And where you are in Ireland determines what beer you drink.

DUBLIN The category-definer dates to 1759, when Arthur Guinness brewed a version of the era’s popular British porters, called “stout” to signal strength. The creamy easy-drinker is sold on nearly every continent (sorry, Antarctica), but some of the best pints of **Guinness** are poured at Dublin’s Victorian-era Long Hall.

KILKENNY Dismayed by the perception that Irish stouts were being dulled down, brothers Seamus and Eamonn O’Hara founded Carlow Brewing Company and, in 1999, released their robust flagship, **O’Hara’s Irish Stout**: Irish grains blended with earthy Fuggle hops created a hearty brew. Head to the affiliated O’Hara’s Brewery Corner to try their namesake craft beers.

CORK CITY Don’t request a Guinness in Cork. The “rebel city” supports **Murphy’s**, which was founded in 1856 by former distiller James J. Murphy. The pride of Cork tastes a bit sweet instead of bitter, recalling chocolate milk on a bender. Decide for yourself at the 125-year-old Sin É, which also serves up Irish music.

—JOSHUA M. BERNSTEIN



Guinness time



BOOKSHELF

New Reads, Great Places

Telling tales in Cuba, Sri Lanka, and more By DON GEORGE

THE RENOWNED Cuban ballet dancer Carlos Acosta leaps into his debut novel, *Pig’s Foot*, with a fantastical tale spanning 150 years of Cuban history. Slavery, revolution, racism, communism, betrayal, violence—it’s all part of the journey Oscar Kortico, the novel’s hyperbole-prone hero, takes to find his ancestral village.

In post-tsunami, post-civil war Sri Lanka, British biology teacher Cherry Briggs vividly retraces the footsteps of a quirky 19th-century explorer. Her new memoir, *The Teardrop Island*, recounts traveling via bus and *tuk-tuk*, from tea estates to temples, and through war zones and cricket matches.

A fishing village in Suffolk, England, sets the scene for an unlikely friendship between a pub owner’s son and a mysterious



A debut novel from Carlos Acosta whirls through Cuban history, from Havana (top) to rural backwaters.

new arrival who turns out to be controversial “Glasgow Style” architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, in Esther Freud’s richly detailed novel *Mr. Mac and Me*. Even more disruptive to village life is the start of WWI, bringing with it coastal vigils and the drone of Zeppelins.

In *The Kindness Diaries*, burned-out broker Leon Logothetis rides a vintage motorcycle through Europe, India, and Southeast Asia, relying on the kindness of strangers—and then generously rewarding them. From a struggling farm in Montenegro to a barely roofed home in rural Cambodia, he finds fuel for his soul.

■ FOR MORE BOOK REVIEWS BY DON GEORGE, GO TO INTELLIGENTTRAVEL.NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.COM.



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—JULES VERNE

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POSTCARD

Greetings From Penang

THERE'S NO FINER END to a day in Penang, Malaysia, than gathering poolside at the Eastern and Oriental Hotel to watch the tropic sun drop into the Strait of Malacca. Drink to the dusk with a cold Tiger beer, a reward for exploring the tightly packed and steamy streets of the city's preserved inner core—a 640-acre UNESCO World Heritage site known by its English colonial name, George Town. A white diamond glistening with the sweat of the exploited laborers who built it, the British imperial port prospered by trading Southeast Asia's treasures of cinnamon, nutmeg, peppers, and silks. The same items are still for sale beneath the colonnaded arcades of "shop-houses" built by the Peranakan Chinese. Those

enterprising Chinese merchants deftly minted money and a legacy—their ancestral tablets commingle with George Town's Hindu, Christian, and Muslim holy sites. That same multicultural tradition can be tasted, too, in local dishes like *koay teow thng*, flat rice noodles and meat saturated in a clear soup, served at long, rough tables on the harbor docks, where stilted houses cluster on six adjoining jetties founded by ancient clans. Their descendants fish the sea until twilight, when their boats sail past a statue of Queen Victoria. Standing on a plinth, her majesty may look toward England, but her heart lies with Penang and the looming, purple night. —Andrew Nelson

TEA TIME

THE BEST PART OF WAKING UP

The next superfood is brewing deep in the Ecuadorian Amazon. *Guayusa* tea packs twice the antioxidants of green tea and as much caffeine as a cup of coffee. Local Kichwa people have long steeped the leaves to focus during hunts and help interpret dreams—and now, thanks to Brooklyn-based Runa, thirsty travelers can taste guayusa in its natural habitat and interact with Amazonian natives during a traditional tea ceremony. —Jeannette Kimmel



Guayusa leaves

TRADITIONS

New Year's Around the World



BELOW THE BELT

Brazilians choose their own fortunes for the coming year by underwear color. Yellow symbolizes prosperity, red passion and love, blue good health and tranquility, and white peace.



FRUIT LOOP

Revelers in Spain each eat 12 grapes to celebrate *Nochevieja* ("old night"): one for each month of the year.



RING TRUE

Buddhist temples in Japan ring their bells 108 times before midnight, a sacred purification ritual.



SEEING DOUBLE

The Samoa Islands straddle two time zones, a 25-hour difference. Last year around 200 people celebrated in Samoa, flew an hour east, and counted down again in American Samoa 24 hours later.

—MEGHAN MINER

THE BEST STORIES ARE NEVER FORGOTTEN,

SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY'RE
TOO BUSY **BEING TOLD.**



Hundreds of canals,
thousands of bridges. The slower we go, the prettier Amsterdam gets. Biking
by the gabled houses along the water is like watching a Van Gogh come
to life. And it's making me even hungrier for dinner at Prego. Legendary
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Marco Polo

REMOTE CONTROL

Shows to Binge-Watch

Can't travel this holiday? Catching up on TV can provide unadulterated escape. **Swede Style:** Scandinavian cool meets confused American in NBC's *Welcome to Sweden*. You'll forgive the mild-mannered writing for its scenery, which is pure drama. **Back East:** Netflix's first historical series follows the wartime exploits of *Marco Polo* as a young man in Kublai Khan's court in 13th-century China. **Time Bomb:** *Manhattan*—WGN America's period piece set in the tumbleweed town of Los Alamos, N. Mex.—chronicles the creation of the atomic bomb during World War II. **Great Scot:** Starz's Scotland fantasy drama, *Outlander*, warps between the 1940s and the 1740s—rife with ripped bodices and rugged landscapes. —KATIE KNOROVSKY

WEB WATCH

HAVE YOU HERD?

Stalk Africa's largest land-animal migration with **HerdTracker**, a new Web app that locates tens of thousands of wildebeests on a real-time Google map. An accompanying news feed—updated by local experts—features firsthand footage of river crossings and predator attacks. —Monika Joshi

LOCAL FLAVOR

A Slice of Scandinavia

THE DANISH WORD *smørrebrød* translates simply as buttered bread, but anyone familiar with the open-face sandwich devoured at lunchtime throughout Copenhagen will consider that pure Nordic understatement. Where to sample? Traditionalists should start at the venerable *Schønnemann's* café, which opened in 1877 and offers some 100 varieties. Copenhagen's new wave of *smørrebrød* kitchens like *Orangeriet* (try the cured salmon with truffled egg) and *Aamanns* feature locally sourced toppings like gooseberries and watercress. For picnics, *Aamanns* offers a takeout kitchen next to its restaurant. —Raphael Kadushin



The Danish version of a dagwood

OPENING

Africa's New Art Hub

The recently restored La Villa Ajavon in Ouidah, Benin, showcases paintings, photographs, and sculptures from more than 40 of the continent's contemporary artists—making the modern art museum one of the first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa. —John Mark Feilmeyer



Wildebeest in Kenya



THE BUZZ

BEDS FOR BUGS

Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon plans to build 27 doll-house-size "insect hotels" to protect the South Korean city's smallest residents—like dragonflies, honeybees, and ladybugs—in crowded districts. The five-story structures will be stuffed with dried grass and oak to shelter the tiny tenants while they enjoy a bug's-eye view of the megacity. —CHRISTINE BLAU

MICHAEL S. YAMASHITA/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE (POLO); YADID LEVY (SMØRREBRØD); WINFRIED WISNIEWSKI/AGE FOTOSTOCK (WILDBEEST); JULICHKA/GETTY IMAGES (LADYBUG)

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TRAVELING WITH KIDS

Can't the Kids Just Get Along?

By HEATHER GREENWOOD DAVIS

Q. On our last road trip the kids' bickering ruined the mood. How do you deal? We pack destination-focused books (*I Wish I Knew That: U.S. Presidents* was perfect for our trip to Washington, D.C.), prep playlists of songs, and bring audiobooks we won't get sick of (*Lightning Thief*, *Narnia*) for times we all need a break. With younger kids, classic car games (the license plate game) or a new version (first person to see a cow...) gets them focused on what's outside the window instead of the sibling archnemesis beside them. Other tricks? Impromptu stops (check out roadside kitsch) and side routes offer a chance for properly belted kids to stretch legs and change moods. Finally, hand over the map. Knowing what's coming next distracts them from asking the proverbial question, "Are we there yet?"

NEED HELP?

For more from family-travel blogger Heather Greenwood Davis, visit our Intelligent Travel blog.

REACH
HEATHER:
Twitter
@greenwooddavis

Q. We are planning a ski trip to Colorado with young kids. Which ski areas are good for beginners? Most of the Colorado resorts will have beginner hills (green), but choose carefully. "At Copper Mountain, a lot of the green terrain is up high on the mountain," says Jennifer Rudolph of Colorado Ski Country. The views are gorgeous, but if your kids are nervous about heights, choose a different property like Ski Granby Ranch, where beginner runs can be seen top to bottom from the base area. Pick lodging that will limit how far you have to carry gear. Ski in/ski out options (or good shuttle bus service) and proximity to the hills you'll use most are key considerations. Beware of unexpected costs: Some lessons include a lift ticket; others don't. Aspen-Snowmass (its "Buttermilk" mountain is

perfect for novice skiers and has a new kids' ski center) and Crested Butte provide free lift tickets to kids six and under. Take advantage of off-mountain activities. Spend an off-slope day in the soaking pools at the Old Town Hot Springs in Steamboat Springs. Beaver Creek hosts the 2015 Alpine World Ski Championships (February), giving kids plenty to watch while they sip a hot chocolate between runs.

Q. We need an affordable place to stay with our daughters in London. Where should we look? Deals are found away from the royals. Choose chain hotels (like Ibis, Novotel, and Park Plaza) in "family friendly" neighborhoods (restaurants that won't flinch at a stroller, parks with more than grass to play on) accessible by the London Underground (aka "the Tube"). Anna Tobin of CiaoBambino.com notes that Hampstead, and its neighboring Hampstead Heath park, are good locations for families. "Kids will enjoy a snack at the local crêpe stand and climbing imaginative playground equipment at Parliament Hill," she says. For more room to stretch out and to save on meal costs, book an apartment or studio stay. Studio2Let, GoNative, or Housetrip offer low-cost options. Purchase an Oyster card—the local Tube pass—to save you from having to fumble for change on every ride.



Visitors enjoy the Fenton House in Hampstead, London (above). Books engage kids on a car trip (top).

MIKE DALLE/CORBIS (BOYS), STEVE RAYMER/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE (HOUSE)

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EXPLORER

Trailblazer of the Horizon

Science is a thrill for this adventurer

SAVING THE PLANET, one scat sample at a time—that's not the slogan for Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation, but it could be. Founded by Gregg Treinish as a way to benefit the environment through adventure sports, the organization plays matchmaker between information collectors and thrill-seekers as well as guiding groups through the backcountry. Treinish funneled his energy into conservation after years of

Nature calls: Gregg Treinish studies wolverines in northern Mongolia.

chasing adventure highs, such as hiking the entire Appalachian Trail and trekking 7,800 miles down the spine of the Andes Mountains. Here the **National Geographic emerging explorer** shares some of his latest highlights, from Montana to Mongolia:

WILD THINGS I've tracked spotted owls in California's forests, grizzly bears in Montana, and sturgeon in the Fort Peck Reservoir. We discovered 17 new species of single-celled algae called diatoms. While tracking an unknown population of wolverines in

the northernmost region of Mongolia, Darkhan, we cross-country skied for 230 miles through remote terrain, surrounded by Siberia on three sides, and collected 33 DNA samples from 27 sets of tracks to establish the first knowledge of this population.

DATA ENTRY The science community is underfunded and desperate for data, without outdoor skills or the time, money, or ability to get into the remote places where the information is. That's where adventurers are going anyway. We identify scientists who are actually creating change now, and we teach adventurers how to collect useful information, from snow and water samples to DNA from scats and hairs.

ROADS DIVERGED So much of what happens in the woods, or while traveling in other ways, pushes limits. I've taken youth who struggle with drugs and family issues backpacking in the wilderness. Far out of their elements, these kids came into their own as they learned about the beauty of a peak and the confidence that comes from self-reliance.

GLACIAL PACE I recently spent 11 days in Iceland. Many people do the Ring Road, but I wanted to focus on a small area, so I went to Vík and slowly hiked my way back across the glaciers, collecting samples of carbon deposits along the way. I saw puffins and explored a cliff edge that I'm probably the first to have climbed. The landscape is unlike anything I've seen before: lava combined with glacial carvings and lush green grasses, thermals, and puffins, whales, and marine life. You can hike for days without seeing anyone.

VALUE ADDED Adventurers and travelers think big and dream outside of the box. There's always an opportunity to make a difference while you play outdoors. That includes everybody, whether you're an Everest climber or hiking a trail or looking for birds. When you collect data, you're no longer an outside observer. You're intimately engaged, learning about the issues a place faces and what it takes to preserve it—and that stays with you for the rest of your life.

JIM HARRIS



NORWAY: A VISUAL JOURNEY



National Geographic Traveler
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

DAN WESTERGREN is a world-class traveler and photographer. Having visited Norway five times, he ranks it high on his all-time favorite list.

What is it about Norway that keeps drawing you?

The beauty, the weather, and the attitude of the people make Norway a dream destination. For me Norway has a crisp, refreshing feel year-round. It's very much a hiking culture. They have the Common Right of Access, which allows people to hike anywhere, even on private land.

What are some of the most photogenic spots?

The Jotunheimen Mountains, where you can trek hut-to-hut. And, of course, the fjords. I love that look from the top, down to the water. It gives you a feeling of endless landscape. There's a World Heritage site called the Preikestolen, or Pulpit Rock, which is this perfect cube of a cliff sitting on the edge of a fjord. It drops straight down for almost 2,000 feet. It's absolutely stunning. Another place beloved by photographers and everybody else is Sognefjord. It's Norway's longest and deepest fjord. Its lush valleys, soaring mountains, and farming villages provide a beautiful backdrop for photos.

What about cultural sites?

I always plan an extra day or two in Oslo, because it's such a wonderful city. There's an opera house at the waterfront, and out in the harbor are these old wooden boats. So it seems very traditional and modern at the same time. Other cultural icons are the stave churches. They're perfectly proportioned and very distinctive, with dragons on the peaks of the roofs. And they're always in some picturesque green valley. It's like photography was made so you could capture the churches of Norway.

What's special about traveling to Norway?

One thing I love is the light. There's the never-ending light of summer, when people stay up to play in the midnight sun. That magic hour of twilight lingers in a sweet golden glow for two to three hours. And then there are the northern lights with their colorful streamers and luminous arches. What else is special? The people. They have a charm and humor that leave a lasting impression.

Start your journey at VisitNorway.com.



PLAN AND BOOK 
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Photos (clockwise from top): Visitors take in awe-inspiring views atop Pulpit Rock/Innovation Norway; Historic Bryggen/Scott Sporleder/Innovation Norway; Jotunheimen National Park/Dan Westergren; Borgund Stave church



Whistler

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Transfer from Vancouver International Airport in high style by taking a private luxury SUV along the breathtaking Sea to Sky Highway. Or begin your vacation with an awe-inspiring, 30-minute helicopter ride from Vancouver. You'll be delivered to the door of your hotel and greeted by an informative concierge. Relax with a soothing swim and ponder your many elegant dining options. Spend the evening luxuriating in one of Whistler's everything-you-need suites.

Day 2

Take a private lesson to fine-tune your downhill skills, or go for gold—an exclusive ski session with a resident Olympian. Learn winning techniques and revel in tales of glory. Then unwind at the award-winning Bearfoot Bistro: Warm up in the world's coldest vodka-tasting room—parkas provided. For a special treat, dine

in the intimate wine cellar and try your hand at Champagne sabering; or be one of only 16 people who sit at the chef's table, with front-row views to the kitchen and Chef Melissa Craig.

Day 3

Spend an invigorating morning at the Whistler Sliding Centre. This former Olympic track gives you a rare chance to experience two thrilling sports. Team up for a bobsled ride where the top sledders won fame, and then go it alone on the super-fast skeleton run. Continue the adventure with an afternoon snowmobile jaunt to Blackcomb Mountain's Crystal Hut for a romantic fondue dinner.

Day 4

Ready for what might be the greatest day of your life? Go for it on a back-country heli-skiing adventure. Unlimited, untracked powder will make for a truly unforgettable ski experience. Après-ski in one of Whistler's warm and inviting lounges like Fifty Two 80 Eatery + Bar. You'll feel a special glow, indoors or out on the fire-heated terrace, sipping signature cocktails and dining on sumptuous fare.



Day 5

Spend your final day being pampered at the Scandinave Spa. Rejuvenate in the wood-burning sauna, relax your muscles in the Nordic waterfall, or bliss out to a well-deserved massage. The magnificent views are yours for the taking. Now it's time to treat yourself to Whistler's culinary jewel, Araxi. In an ambience both warm and contemporary, you'll savor innovative farm-to-table cuisine sourced from the nearby Pemberton Valley. Walk home via Whistler Village's pedestrian stroll and—why not?—pick up a unique gift in one of the many intimate galleries.

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WHERE TO FIND THE
SWEET SPOTS
PARIS PASTRY

Your guide to the city's bakeries, pastry shops, and confectioners, hand-picked by Paris-based author and pastry chef David Lebovitz and organized by arrondissement and type of sweet. The photos are luscious enough to eat, and the descriptions on each shop offer guidance on what to order, in case you're not sure what *mille-feuille* means. Available for iOS for \$4.



Stray cat in the Italian town of Burano

PROBLEM SOLVED

Putting the Cat in the Bag

By CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Q. I've fallen in love with a stray kitten. Can I take her home? Feral animals are a big problem around the world, with Mexico leading in complaints from international visitors. The strays can be adorable, but also dangerous (avoid petting them). Animal bites are one of the chief causes of injuries to tourists and may necessitate a painful series of rabies shots. If you want to bring Fluffy home, you'll first need to take her to a local vet, who can give her all her shots. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention requires that dogs and cats be examined at the first port of entry for evidence of diseases that can be transmitted to humans. By the way, dogs must have a valid rabies vaccination certificate, although the kitten you're looking at does not. Before you adopt abroad, I'd listen to what Diana Webster has to say. She's the president of Humane Advisor, an organization that helps animals through tourism. "I have mixed feelings about adopting strays from other countries when our own shelters are overflowing and when

NEED HELP?

Editor at Large
Christopher
Elliott is our
consumer
advocate and
author of *How
to Be the World's
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the price of the transport could fund ten spay or neuter surgeries for animals left behind," she says. But if your heart's set on adopting, she recommends working with a local rescue agency.

Q. I'm shopping for airfare to South Florida. I heard that if I wait until after midnight on a Tuesday, I can score a deal. Is that true? Not so much. "That's an urban myth built on some half-truths," says Rick Seaney, the chief executive of FareCompare.com. Chris Lopinto, who runs the site ExpertFlyer.com, agrees. "There is no one perfect time. Fares can be loaded and changed multiple times a day," he says. So how to find the deals? Fly in the off-season or over a weekend. Book at least a month early and monitor the price to see if it goes down, using a site like Yapta.com, says Lopinto. If it does, you can use the site to adjust your fare, if the rules allow it. Bargain hounds who stay up late to find specials may or may not save a few bucks, but that kind of sleep deprivation is almost never worth your time.

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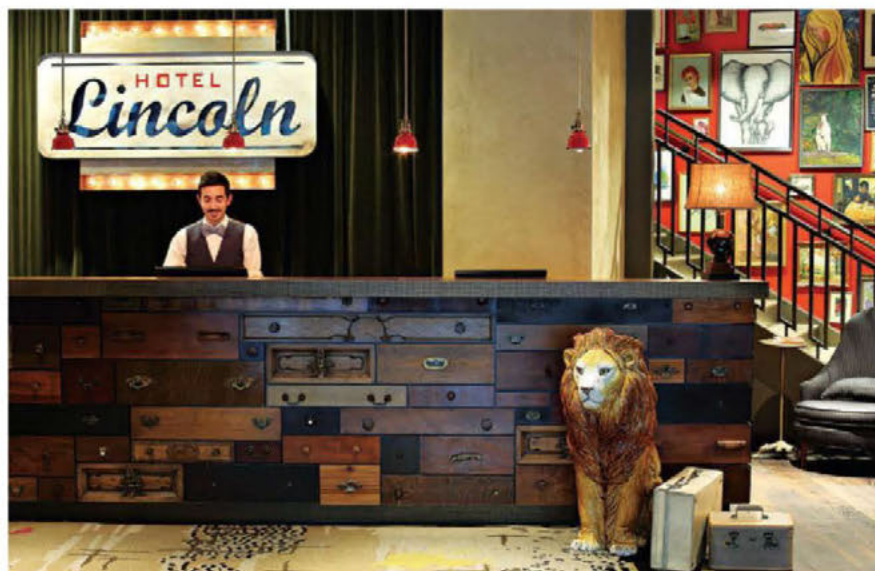
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CHECKING IN

CHICAGO'S INDIE HOTELS

HOTEL LINCOLN In the heart of Chicago's leafy, stroller-pushing Lincoln Park neighborhood, just minutes north of downtown, all ages find their *Sweet Home Chicago* at this 1920s-era inn that reopened in 2012 with 184 family-friendly guest rooms across from Lake Michigan. Guests benefit from local staff who point out their area favorites, such as Second City Comedy Club. "We guide guests to the parts of Chicago we enjoy," hotel manager Onal Kucuk says. ■ **LINCOLN PARK; FROM \$220**

THE GODFREY Located within walking distance of Michigan Avenue's Magnificent Mile and Chicago's densest concentration of contemporary art galleries, the 16-story Godfrey Hotel rises like a steel-and-glass stack of Legos in the River North neighborhood, adding to the city's rich architectural lexicon as the first staggered steel truss building in town. Don't miss: free Saturday gallery walks organized by *Chicago Gallery News*. ■ **RIVER NORTH; FROM \$169**

RENAISSANCE BLACKSTONE A classic Chicago gem across from Grant Park in the Loop—the city's central business district—the Blackstone first opened in 1910. Since then, the beaux-arts beauty has hosted every president from William Taft to Jimmy Carter. A restoration in 2008 revealed gilded walnut paneling and brass banisters in the lobby. Docents from the nearby Chicago Architecture Foundation lead daily walking tours through the North or South Loop. ■ **SOUTH LOOP; FROM \$279**

NOTE: RATES ARE THE HOTEL'S PUBLISHED PRICES. INQUIRE ABOUT LOW SEASON RATES AFTER JANUARY 1.



The Hotel Lincoln exudes a neighborhood vibe (top and left), while the Godfrey (center) and Blackstone (right) flaunt their architectural bona fides.

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Away from the chic coast,
Corsica's mountainous interior
spotlights historical sites like
the citadel at Corte.

WORLD 2015

GREAT PLACES WILL HAVE YOU PACKING YOUR BAGS

THE PRESIDIO, SAN FRANCISCO

FROM SPANISH CONQUISTADORES TO STAR WARS

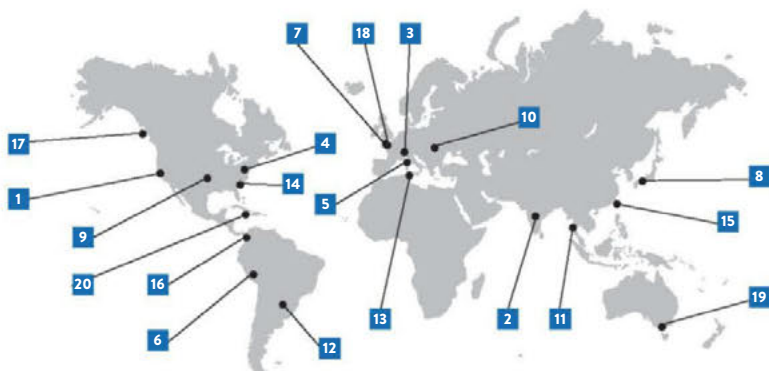
1 IF THE SAN FRANCISCO Peninsula resembles a forearm ending in a fist, then the Presidio is the topmost knuckle-by-the-Bay. The virile park of viridian woods and knockout vistas can make travelers forget its original function was for war, not Instagram. To San Franciscans, it's both muse and playground—with the latest addition being the newly transformed Officers' Club, reimagined as a local hub for exhibits, performances, and dining.

Established by Spanish conquistadores in 1776, the military garrison of St. Francis and its 2.3 square miles defended the bay from any invaders tempted by the riches of Alta California. For the next 218 years, soldiers stood guard against the machinations of empires. But the English, Russian, Japanese, and Klingons—*Star Trek*'s Starfleet Command is headquartered

here—never came. The base became a coveted U.S. Army assignment. Officers dream of three things, the saying went: “to make colonel, to die and go to heaven, and to be posted to the Presidio.”

In 1994, ownership passed from the Army to the National Park Service. Now the Presidio is a self-sustaining trust, thanks to rents paid by one-percenters like George Lucas, whose Lucasfilms office here is blessed with a Yoda sculpture on a fountain. (Critics prefer sculptor Andy Goldsworthy's nearly hundred-foot-tall “Spire,” near the Arguello Gate.) But why nitpick? Instead, savor a hot chocolate after a hike on Crissy Field. Listen for the whiz-whir generated by bikers pumping down Lincoln Boulevard above North Baker Beach's clothing-optional sunbathers. Delight in the eucalyptus-scented footpath called Lovers' Lane. The Presidio, young Skywalker! The Force is strong with this one. —ANDREW NELSON

BEST OF THE WORLD 2015



- 1 The Presidio, San Francisco 2 Hyderabad, India 3 Zermatt, Switzerland 4 National Mall, Washington, D.C. 5 Corsica 6 Choquequirao, Peru 7 Sark, Channel Islands 8 Koyasan, Japan 9 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 10 Maramureș, Romania 11 Mergui Archipelago, Myanmar 12 Esteros del Iberá, Argentina 13 Tunis, Tunisia 14 Sea Islands, South Carolina 15 Taiwan 16 Medellín, Colombia 17 Haida Gwaii, British Columbia 18 Mont St. Michel, France 19 Mornington Peninsula, Australia 20 Port Antonio, Jamaica



A waiter preps a table at Hyderabad's Taj Falaknuma Palace.



2

HYDERABAD, INDIA

A DIAMOND IS FOREVER

STORIES OF HYDERABAD'S poetic past weave amid strings of programming code in this southeastern India city that was home to one of the richest men in the world, Mir Osman Ali Khan, the last ruling nizam of Hyderabad. Now a seedbed for many global IT brands, Cyberabad (as it's dubbed) is where you can hear the muezzin's call above the traffic din generated by aging Urdu scholars and young software engineers alike. Here, ancient boulders guard the peripheries of HITEC City, while new rooftop bars hem in lakes and gardens. The opulent Taj Falaknuma Palace hotel perches atop a hill overlooking the Old City, where Irani cafés thrive alongside fifth-generation pearl merchants and the finest fountain pen makers. Prone to exaggeration, the Hyderabadis' conversations within these cafés often linger over three cups of chai and four hours.

A good Muslim ruler was expected to be an expert with the pen as well as the sword; the city's founder, Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah, is credited with the first published anthology of Urdu poetry. The later ruling dynasty, the nizams, provided patronage to poets within their court. Attend a *mushaira* (poetry symposium) for a good introduction to the city's literary legacy. There's also the Hyderabad Literary Festival, in January, followed by February's Deccan Festival, during which the most passionate performances involve *qawwali*, an 800-year-old form of Sufi music. Another evocative setting for qawwali is Chowmahalla Palace, the recently restored residence of the nizams. "Dakhan—Hyderabad—is the diamond, the world is the ring," says historian Narendra Luther, quoting the court poet Mulla Vajahi. "The ring's splendor lies in the diamond." —SIMAR PREET KAUR



3

ZERMATT, SWITZERLAND

PEAK OF PERFECTION

WHY WOULD A remote farming hamlet turn into a first-class travel destination that attracts 1.5 million visitors a year? The answer is simple: Because it's there.

Zermatt, the only village on the Swiss side of the Matterhorn, has been luring travelers ever since British adventurer Edward Whymper made the first ascent of the mythical 14,692-foot peak 150 years ago, on July 14, 1865. Nowadays car-free

Zermatt witnesses a colorful procession of chocolate-nibbling tourists searching for cow souvenirs, sunbrowned hikers and climbers clomping around in big boots, and the fashionably rich lavishing hundreds of thousands of dollars on Swiss watches. Yet, one activity bonds all: Nobody can resist pointing a camera up to that majestic wonder of nature. The Matterhorn isn't the highest peak in the Swiss Alps, but its nearly perfect triangular shape makes it one of the most photographed in the world.

Only a five-minute walk from most hotels, the Kirchstrasse bridge makes an ideal location to watch the sunrise awakening of the mountain. But the closest to the summit a visitor can get without donning a climbing rope is via a helicopter ride with Air Zermatt. "I've flown around the summit some 5,000 times now, but it's still an amazing experience," says pilot Gerold Biner, who was raised in Zermatt. "Sometimes we can even see the smiles on the faces of the climbers."

—MENNO BOERMANS



Hikers survey the
Matterhorn from the
summit of Tête Blanche.

NATIONAL MALL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE GREAT UNFINISHED WORK

4 HISTORY IS A MEANDERING river, not a straight line. And yet Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 plan for the new federal city sketched out a tidy grid of grand boulevards, gardens, and monuments—as if geometry alone could create a nation.

At the heart of his original scheme for Washington, D.C., was a mile-long stretch of green, a blank slate for an emerging America. As the nation's fortunes grew, so did the National Mall, and by 1922 the park spanned two miles, from the Capitol grounds to the newly dedicated Lincoln Memorial.

Changing times called for evolving landscapes. Where Victorian plants once bloomed, congressional staffers in fluorescent knee-highs now play kickball. Where Mary Ann Hall's high-class brothel prospered during the Civil War, the National Museum of the American Indian stands. An effort to protect "high-tech turf," recently planted by the National Park Service, threatens to push popular annual festivals off the green lawn.

The Mall is embraced as hallowed ground not because architects willed it but because people chose it. Citizens congregate on the Lincoln Memorial steps—where Marian Anderson sang "America" in 1939 and where Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963—to contemplate democracy's "unfinished work," Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address words, etched in the monument to his legacy.

With the rise of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, due to open in 2015, the National Mall marches toward what it should be: not just a formal park in a federal city, but also a central space for self-expression and equal representation. In short, a field where dreams can come true. —GEORGE W. STONE

CORSICA

NAPOLÉON'S SOULFUL ISLAND HOME

5 TWO HUNDRED YEARS AFTER Napoleon Bonaparte suffered his final military defeat, Corsica, his birthplace, stubbornly resists its own cultural Waterloo. Though this Mediterranean island has deep, historic ties to Italy and has been part of France since 1769, its 300,000 inhabitants retain a fierce pride in their unique culture, including the proverb-rich

Corsican tongue. But to keep that birthright vibrant in the face of tourism and its homogenizing effects, their battle remains constant.

Fortunately, most of the island's three million annual visitors come for the undeniable pleasures of the coast or for the thrill of visiting historic La Maison Bonaparte, in the city of Ajaccio. All of which leaves the island's mountainous interior largely untouched. "Go inland and you will find the soul of Corsica," advises Jean-Sébastien Orsini, director of

a traditional Corsican polyphonic choir in the foothill town of Calenzana.

Olive groves and quiet villages dot the slopes and isolated valleys of the interior, vast swaths of which are protected by the Parc Naturel Régional de Corse, which covers almost 40 percent of the island. Hiking trails lace forests of oak and pine. In the villages here, you encounter Corsicans who still feel passionately the adage "*Una lingua si cheta, un populu si more*—A language is silenced, a people die." —CHRISTOPHER HALL

CHOQUEQUIRAO, PERU

THE OTHER MACHU PICCHU

6 THE INCA emperors had quite the eye for spectacular real estate. Upon taking power, each of these great lords picked a breathtaking piece of property for a new royal residence. The emperor Pachacutec likely built the most famous of these royal digs, Machu Picchu, on a mountainous ridge of cloud forest northwest of Cusco. But his successor, Tupa Inca, was no slouch either: His presumed estate, Choquequirao, drapes temples, plazas, and fountains along an orchid-strewn mountain 61 miles west of Cusco.

At an elevation of 9,800 feet, it lacks easy access by railway or bus. But the cardio-intensive climb is well worth it. Choquequirao looks much as it did when the Inca finally abandoned it. And travelers often have the place nearly to themselves: Only 20 to 30 people journey there each day in the high season. "It's like Machu Picchu in the 1940s," says Gary Ziegler, an American archaeologist who has written a book on Choquequirao.

But all that may be changing. The Peruvian government is studying the possibility of constructing a tramway to Choquequirao, hoping to lure travelers away from the crowded vistas of Machu Picchu. It's a prospect that saddens Ziegler. Choquequirao, he says, "may be the last pristine royal Inca estate in the mountains." —**HEATHER PRINGLE**



SARK, CHANNEL ISLANDS

TRADITION'S LAST STAND

7 IN SARK, TIME FLOWS like molasses. Sarkees will mark the 450th anniversary of feudalism in 2015; the tiny Channel Island off the coast of Normandy abolished the medieval form of governance only in 2008. But old ways linger: The two banks have no ATMs; the unpaved roads lack streetlights; cars are banned.

Signposts usefully give distances in walking minutes, for in this unhurried place ambling is what one does—or cycling, or riding in a horse-drawn carriage. Wander country roads

bordered by fieldstone walls and storybook cottages, past foxgloves and bluebells and 600 other kinds of wildflowers, taking note of butterflies, seabirds, and Guernsey cows. Destination? Perhaps the sea caves at Gouliot Headland, to find anemones. Or La Marguerite Cottage, to buy duck eggs from Sue Adams's streetside honor box. Or Venus Pool, for a swim at low-tide. Or especially La Coupée, to walk the skinny track atop an isthmus 300 feet above the sea.

A visitor's daytime choices abound. But late at night, there's just one: the sky. Sark is the first island certified by the International Dark-Sky Association. Time may have swept feudalism aside. The stars are timeless. —**PETER JOHANSEN**

JEREMY HORNER/PANOS PICTURES



Visitors approach the main pagoda in Koyasan, one of Japan's sacred sites.

KOYASAN, JAPAN

LET THERE BE ENLIGHTENMENT

THE AUSTERE HEART OF JAPANESE Buddhism beats loudly at Koyasan, a monastic complex that lies two hours by train south of Osaka. Koyasan marks its 1,200th anniversary in 2015.

Established by revered scholar-monk Kobo Daishi in 816 as the headquarters for his Shingon school of Esoteric Buddhism, Koyasan remains one of Japan's most pristine and sacred sites, manifesting a masculine side of Japan worlds away from the hostesses and Hello Kittys of Kyoto.

"Koyasan is purity," says a monk after a crack-of-dawn fire ceremony, where a priest burns wooden wish-tablets to the boom of a *taiko* drum and the sprinkling of herbs and oils on high-leaping flames. Staying in one of the temples that welcome guests here opens a portal onto everyday monastic life. Waking to enshrouding mists, visitors are invited to join morning chants swirled by cymbals, gongs, and incense. At dinnertime, no-nonsense monks who began the day hand-scrubbing wooden hallways roughly plop vegetarian feasts in front of visitors.

Kobo Daishi is believed to live here still, sitting in eternal meditation in an elaborate mausoleum, and through the centuries, Japan's most rich and powerful have built palatial sepulchers here as well. At night, a ghostly lantern-lit trail winds among the moss-covered stones deep into the mystery and majesty of ancient Japan. —DON GEORGE

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

PRIDE OF THE PLAINS

9 OKLAHOMA CITY HAS never been "mighty pretty," despite the shout-out from Bobby Troup's iconic "Route 66." To look at, it's been more like the beer-gut metropolis spilling across the Great Plains. But things have changed.

The central Oklahoma River has a community boathouse and a new West River Trail. An 11-acre white-water rafting center is due in 2015. Local architect firms and coffee roasters that wouldn't be out of place in *Portlandia* now line once dormant

Automobile Alley. And then there's MidTown. Not long ago a den of crack houses and abandoned lots just north of downtown's 1995 bombing site, MidTown has sprouted condos, a boutique hotel, and Dust Bowl Lanes, a Tulsan import, with its 1970s-style bowling alley. The city even plans to add a streetcar loop downtown in 2017.

This is Oklahoma?

"We're such a blank canvas that even people from Austin are moving here," says Hunter Wheat, who just launched MidTown's Bleu Garten, a one-block food truck complex with open-air movies and live bands. "I'm just happy to see it's growing into the city I always knew it could be." —ROBERT REID

Sisters photographed
in 2013 in Sârbi,
Romania, proudly say
they have no plans to
leave their village.



10

MARAMUREȘ, ROMANIA BOLDLY OLD WORLD

IN THE HISTORIC land of Maramureș the hills are alive with ways long forgotten elsewhere in Europe. “My cows don’t like grass that is cut with a machine,” Ion Pop says while harvesting his meadow near the village of Botiza. “They prefer the clean taste of hand-cut.”

The splendor is not just in the grass. In this remote northwest corner of Romania 300 miles from Bucharest, the schedule is set by the seasons, the weather, tradition. In each of the five valleys, with their rambling rivers and haystack-dappled fields, life plays out as it has for hundreds of years—though one recent change is telling. Rather than asphaltting roads that are mainly used by horse and carriage, Maramureș has newly upgraded its bike trails—pathways to experience the region at the pace it deserves.

Maramureș is a wooden world. The farm tools are made of wood, and wooden gates, chiseled with century-old motifs, form the glorious entrances to modest yards around wooden, steep-roofed houses. UNESCO-designated churches from the 17th and 18th centuries tell stories of faith and glory, saints and sinners, crime and punishment, through still vivid paintings on their wooden walls.

Many of the colorful wooden crosses at the Merry Cemetery in the village of Săpânța are inscribed with lighthearted epitaphs written in verse. They laugh in the face of death—and hence celebrate immortality. —**PANCRAS DIJK**



A diver explores
Burma's Mergui
Archipelago.

MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO, MYANMAR ROLLING IN THE DEEPS

11 “FORBIDDEN ISLANDS” sounds like something from a fairy tale, and stories about Myanmar’s Mergui Archipelago do seem like a fantasy: hundreds of hidden white-sand beaches, dense unexplored jungles, and clans of the mysterious Moken sea gypsies.

Klaus Reisinger, who co-directed a documentary titled *Burma’s Forbidden Islands* about the island chain, calls the area “one of the last paradises left on Earth.”

The Burmese government kept the area off-limits to foreigners until 1997. Since opened to a handful of tour operators, the 800 islands scattered off the southern coast of Myanmar, in the Andaman Sea, are so seldom visited that many of them are known only as numbers on navigation charts.

Wildlife sightings include monitor lizards, sea eagles, and long-tailed macaques. Despite years of unregulated dynamite fishing, snorkeling and dive spots still reveal an aquatic festival of life, including eagle rays, sharks, and the occasional whale shark. The nomadic Moken people, now largely forced into settlements, maintain their fishing traditions as they have for countless generations. As an epic of the Moken goes, “The Moken are born, live, and die on their boats, and the umbilical cords of their children plunge into the sea.” —**BILL FINK**

READERS’
CHOICE
WINNER

FAROE ISLANDS “ON MARCH 20, 2015, THERE WILL BE A FULL SOLAR ECLIPSE ON THE FAROE ISLANDS. MY GRAND-MOTHER TOLD ME ABOUT THE ONE THAT OCCURRED IN THESE NORTH ATLANTIC ISLANDS 60 YEARS AGO. BIRDS ACTED WEIRD, BUT HENS JUST WENT INSIDE THEIR HOUSE TO SLEEP. A FEW MINUTES LATER, THE DAY WAS BRIGHT AGAIN, AND LIFE WENT ON.” —*Sigríð Mikkjalsdóttir, of the Faroe Islands, whose entry was picked from over a hundred online nominations*



ESTEROS DEL IBERÁ, ARGENTINA

REALM OF THE JAGUAR

12

A DAY'S DRIVE NORTH and a world away from Buenos Aires, a glittering web of lakes and marshes inundates 3.2 million acres in Argentina's northeastern Corrientes Province. The Guaraní call it Y Berá, "brilliant water." This entire immense area of wetlands, or esteros, was declared

a natural reserve in 1983, with 40 percent protected within the boundaries of Iberá Provincial Park. Iberá is one of South America's most important reserves of fresh water, offering refuge for a vast cast of birds and other creatures. No vertical peaks dazzle the visitor from afar; it is a horizontal landscape that one must enter to know its intimate, surprising beauty.

The jaguar was the stealthy lord of the esteros until intensive hunting drove it out in the 1950s. But attitudes have changed. "What obliges us to care

for these wetlands is the fact that they have always been and will continue to be instrumental in shaping what it means to be a Correntino," says Perico Perea Muñoz, a rancher and environmental leader. "Without the Iberá wetlands, Corrientes is simply not Corrientes." Now a reintroduction project is bringing the jaguar back.

In 2015, with any luck, the first wild jaguar cubs in over half a century will be born in Iberá. And Corrientes will truly be Corrientes again. —BETH WALD



13

A café overlooks the marina in the Tunis suburb of Sidi Bou Said.

TUNIS, TUNISIA

NEW SPARK IN NORTH AFRICA

BYRSA HILL, IN TUNIS'S upmarket suburb of Carthage, makes a dizzying aerie to watch the sun set into the bay. The vantage point might be the Light Bar at the decidedly 21st-century Villa Didon, but Phoenician streets lie deep beneath and, down on the water's edge, the scalloped foreshore traces a Roman naval port. Inland, the coils of the ancient medina and the colonial grid of the early 20th-century French city tell other chapters of Tunis's story of conquest, resistance, flux, and assimilation, from mythic Dido to the Jasmine Revolution of 2011.

The city's layered charms are something that many prerevolution visitors missed entirely, on their way to the Sahara or the Mediterranean beach resorts of Hammamet and Sousse. These sun-holiday tribes all but abandoned Tunisia after 2011, but with a relaxation of most travel warnings to the country, a new breed of traveler has replaced them. They come to discover Tunis's past, yes, and now also its cultural energy, what Ahmed Loubiri, the organizer of international electronic music festival EPHEMERE, sees as a widespread "urge to be creative." Loubiri says this ranges from "random jam sessions in garages and coffee shops to humongous festivals." Galleries such as Selma Feriani and Hope Contemporary continue to thrive in the neighborhoods of La Marsa and Sidi Bou Said, and Tunisia's antiquities museum, the Bardo, has reopened with an ambitious new wing.

"It's a Tunisian habit to know how to receive guests. We get back as much as we give," says Marouane ben Miled, who runs La Chambre Bleue, a medina B&B, suggesting that this fresh popularity might also mark the beginning of a fertile conversation. —DONNA WHEELER

ON THE WEB

When to go, where to stay, and how to make the most of these go-now destinations: www.nationalgeographic.com/best-trips-2015. Join the conversation using #bestoftheworld.

SEA ISLANDS, SOUTH CAROLINA

PATHWAY TO A FORGOTTEN PAST

14 CRUISE HIGHWAY 278, the main road on South Carolina's Hilton Head Island, and it may seem that little has changed in the 59 years since entrepreneur Charles Fraser developed this sultry Low Country sea island as one of America's first "eco-planned" resorts. But visitors are beginning to

learn that some of the most important chapters of American history took place here, right beneath their vacation-tanned feet. Take Mitchelville, for instance, a settlement established by freed slaves in 1862, a year before the Emancipation Proclamation. On St. Helena, the Penn Center stands as one of the first schools in the South to educate Gullah people.

These spots surprise and intrigue visitors, who arrive knowing little, if anything, about them. Why? "Well, who writes history?" Joyce Wright asks

rhetorically, eyebrows arched. Wright is executive director of the Mitchelville Preservation Project, one of the member organizations in the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. Here, visitors experience Gullah culture through storytelling, sweetgrass basket weaving, and sampling traditional food. Though the corridor cuts through the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida, Hilton Head and St. Helena are the heart of living Gullah culture, where once forgotten stories find voice. —JULIE SCHWIETERT COLLAZO



TAIWAN

OUT OF CHINA'S SHADOW

15 AS CHINA gets mightier and smoggier, Taiwan feels calmer and cleaner. When China restricted access to the Internet, Taiwan provided free Wi-Fi islandwide. When China marginalized its ethnic groups, Taiwan reintroduced indigenous Formosan languages to schools. Taiwan ranks in the top 50 (out of 178) on the Environmental

Performance Index, while China sank to the 118th spot.

But Taiwan is much more than China's contrarian runaway bride. The sweet-potato-shaped island—a tad smaller than Switzerland (but almost as mountainous)—has a high-tech global urban sector and a thriving aboriginal society. In one decade, “Made in Taiwan” went from being a sign of bad quality to a national statement of pride.

Skyscraper-filled capital Taipei, with a population of seven million, has been

named 2016's World Design Capital. A flurry of new buildings opens in 2015, including a performing arts center designed by Rem Koolhaas's firm.

More than anything, Taipei lives up to its reputation as a food mecca. “Forget about breakfast at the hotel,” says popular Taipei food blogger Peray. “In the morning, at food stalls, you can get clay oven rolls, charcoal grill sandwiches, rice with chicken, and rice noodle soup with pork. The challenge here is staying hungry.” —ADAM H. GRAHAM



Traditional flower bearers annually parade in Medellín.

MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA

FAMOUS FOR FLOWERS. YES, FLOWERS

16

CALL IT THE MEDELLÍN MIRACLE. Colombia's second city still has its vices, but the world's former cocaine capital has been rehabbed. Terrorism has ceded to tourism, thanks to visionary social policies that have transformed the once

menacing city into a model metropolis. Slums where police feared to tread are now linked to the innovative business and cultural hub by the well-protected Metrocable, whisking visitors aloft to Barrio Santo Domingo, a new tourist hot spot where the black cubist España library perches dramatically over the shanties. Downtown, in the valley below, sunlight glints on skyscrapers and avant-garde architecture framed by Andean mountains—proof that a jewel is made complete by a stunning setting.

Art-filled public parks lie at the heart of the city's holistic makeover. Voluptuous sculptures by Medellín native Fernando Botero stud Plaza Botero, where the Museo de Antioquia displays paintings by Botero and Picasso. Nearby, office workers strolling Plaza de los Pies Descalzos ("barefoot park") cast off shoes and socks to rejuvenate amid a sensory Zen garden. Families flock to Parque Explora, with its interactive science exhibits and world-class aquarium. Self-assured young people in designer jeans swell Parque de Lleras, the city's epicenter for chic nightlife. Art-mad Medellínenses have even morphed a former steel mill into the Museo de Arte Moderno. Its Bonuar restaurant serves Creole fusion fare spiced with live American-style blues.

Tradition? Relax. It scents the air when the City of Eternal Spring bursts into bloom for the annual Feria de las Flores in August. The 58-year-old flower festival fills the streets with kaleidoscopic color, a winsome testament to Medellín's metamorphosis. —CHRISTOPHER P. BAKER

HAIDA GWAI, BRITISH COLUMBIA

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

17 THE QUIET IS what strikes people most, here on Haida Gwaii. On this 180-mile-long archipelago off the coast of British Columbia, labyrinthine coves snuggle up to dense forests with towering cedars. Beneath the ground, scientists have found evidence of human habitation stretching back 12,000 years.

"We brought students—minus laptops and cellphones—to the forest," says Guujaaw, a Haida leader. "They could carry a pencil and paper for sketching. A couple of hours later, one student said the sound of the pencil scratching on the pad was too loud."

Thirty years ago it wasn't so quiet. In 1985 the Haida people, alarmed by the ecological damage caused by clear-cutting, blockaded the logging road. This nonviolent protest led to Canada's creation in 2010 of Gwaii Haanas

National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site. In the village of SGang Gwaay, Haida Watchmen share their culture with visitors to this UNESCO World Heritage destination.

"You can use your listening sense more," says Ernie Gladstone, a Haida who serves as superintendent of the reserves and heritage site. "You hear the water washing down the beaches, clams squirting, and ravens, eagles, and songbirds in the forest." —APRIL ORCUTT

MONT ST. MICHEL, FRANCE

FAITH AND A FEAT OF HUMAN GENIUS

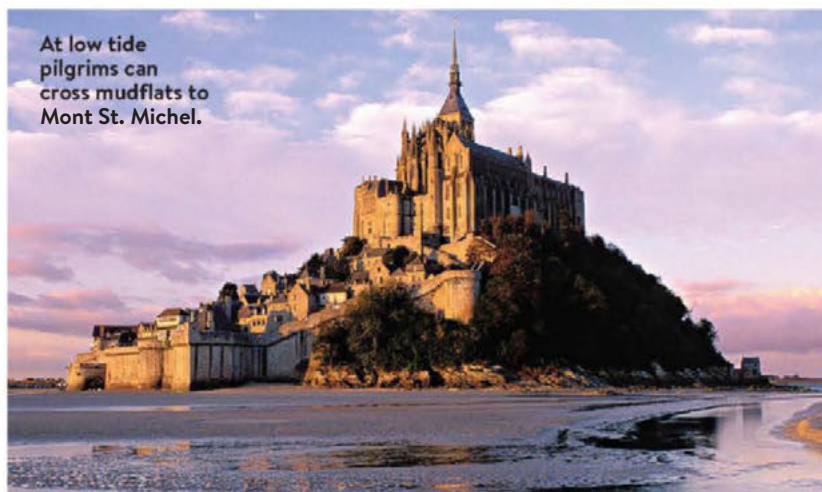
18

FOR ABOUT A THOUSAND years, travelers have gasped when the Abbey of Mont St. Michel has loomed into view, rising from a bay fed by tides that are among the highest and most treacherous in Europe. What makes the sight transcendent is the play of light, sky, and weather that can shift hourly here off the coast of Normandy. Total isolation was the point, and pilgrims had to wait for the

tide to recede to make their way across the flats to the abbey.

In 1879, a causeway was built to ease the approach to Mont St. Michel. That and years of agricultural development, though, led to a buildup of silt and sea grass. Rather than lording regally over an expanse of water, Mont St. Michel now stood at the end of a massive mudflat. A reclamation project began in 2005 with the goal of returning the abbey as much as possible to the maritime context the monks envisioned.

“What is important is not that we are restoring it to its original state,” says Patrick Morel, who is heading up the massive reclamation effort that includes a dam and a pedestrian bridge leading to the foot of the mount. “We are restoring the original spirit.” The work is on schedule to finish in 2015, when, with deliberate calibration, 50 times a year, Mont St. Michel and its great monastery will once again seem to float in the water that surrounds it. —**MARCIA DESANCTIS**



PORT ANTONIO, JAMAICA

BLITHE SPIRITS IN PARADISE

20

WHEN A HURRICANE BLEW his yacht off course in 1946, Hollywood heartthrob Errol Flynn discovered paradise in Jamaica's Port Antonio, purportedly proclaiming it “more beautiful than any woman I have ever known.” This haven on the island's northeast coast first boomed when American millionaires such as Alfred Mitchell and his heiress wife, Annie Tiffany, built estates in the early 1900s. Flynn's arrival cued a second swell, drawing Noël Coward and Katharine Hepburn.

Now a new generation has discovered Portie's pleasures, from the smoke-fogged jerk grills lining Boston Beach to the log rafts that drift down the lazy Rio Grande. British music producer Jon Baker opened Geejam, a seven-room boutique hideaway. And with Portie-born, Toronto-based financier Michael Lee-Chin, he has relaunched two formerly faded properties, the Trident Hotel and the Castle. Together they are reviving the Blue Lagoon, the famed swimming hole.

“The Blue Mountains are our natural filter,” says Baker of the forested highlands that lie between Jamaica's capital, Kingston, and its most pristine coast. “You have to try harder to get here, and dig a little deeper for the reward.” —**ELAINE GLUSAC**

19

MORNINGTON PENINSULA, AUSTRALIA

EAT, DRINK, PLAY, REPEAT

THOUGH SYDNEY MIGHT argue the point, Melbourne has established itself as Australia's food capital, home to innovative culinary ideas such as micro coffee roasters, nonprofit cafés, and expat pop-ups (British chef Heston Blumenthal is moving his Fat Duck from England to Melbourne for six months next year). Melbourne's chief wine region is the nearby Yarra Valley, but an emerging source of bounty is the rugged Mornington Peninsula, about an hour's drive south from downtown via a recently opened roadway. The peninsula distills the flavors of Down Under in one boot-shaped cape: paddock-to-plate restaurants, down-to-earth wineries where the vintners themselves work the tasting rooms, and small sustainable farms such as 2 Macs and Green Olive at Red Hill that each offer cooking classes.

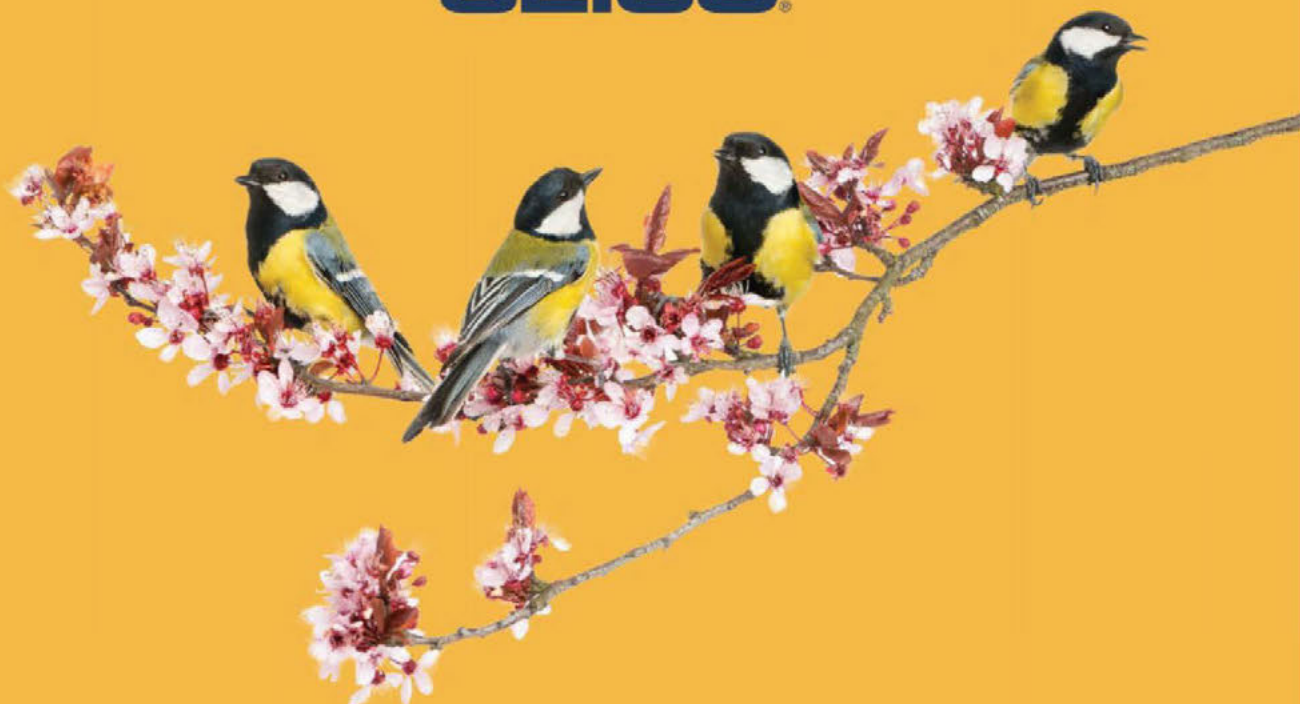
But the region isn't just about food. In fact, “it has always been Melbourne's playground, with people flocking to the beaches over summer,” says Danielle Field, who, with her brother Max, guides MP Experience food tours of the Hinterland Region of Pinot Noir growers, apple orchards, and strawberry farms. Snorkelers come to encounter leafy sea dragons. Terrestrial wildlife lovers seek out nocturnal pademelons and bettongs. Says Field, “Now the Mornington Peninsula really has something for everyone.” —**ELAINE GLUSAC**

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THE ROAD TO WELLVILLE

ERIC FELTEN GOES WEST, WITH GRANDMA'S JOURNAL,
DAD'S MEMORIES, AND A STUFFED BUNNY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY AARON HUEY

A 1932 Chevy, like the
model the author's
grandfather drove
cross-country, turns
on a disused road
in New Mexico.





Fun blast from the past:
A carnival dries after rain
in Wills Point, Texas. The
town is on Route 80, the
Dixie Overland Highway,
traveled in 1936 by
the author's father and
grandparents (right).



U.S. ROUTE 1 southbound from Washington, D.C., is a nightmare of suburban congestion at the moment. What once was a national artery connecting Maine with Key West, Florida, when my father and his parents drove it in 1936 is clogged with traffic and traffic lights. I wonder what my father, next to me in the passenger seat, thinks of the difference.

At least we have great music to listen to. I pull out a box of CDs I've assembled, recordings from 1936, with songs by Billie Holiday, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong. I put in a disc and, feeling proud of my planning, say, "Pop, I've got enough music to get us across the country listening to just what you were hearing on the radio as you made your trip."

"The car didn't have a radio," he says.

Right. No radio. No DVD player. No Nintendo. In fact none of the electronic distractions considered essential today for kids on a road trip. My father had two toys on his cross-country journey, a Lionel electric train carefully packed in the trunk and a stuffed bunny. It's a measure of how precious they were to little Les that he still has both. The train comes out each Christmas to circle my parents' tree. The bunny, which hasn't seen daylight for decades, is riding with us now, a sort of touchstone.

We're retracing a journey my father, Lester Felten, Jr., made with his parents, Lester and Lorrie, when he was six. They'd sold almost all they owned in New Jersey and loaded what little was left into a secondhand 1932 Chevrolet for a journey west. My grandparents, it turns out, were on the tail end of a great migration, now largely forgotten. When most of us think of settlers heading west, we picture farmers or ranchers looking for land, or gold-panning forty-niners searching for El Dorado. But an astonishing number of those who went west in the late 1800s

COURTESY OF ERIC FELTEN (FAMILY PORTRAIT)





Lonesome dude:
Rancher Albert Miller
rests by the Hi Way
Cafe, a fixture in
Valentine, Texas.



and early 1900s weren't hunting fortunes. They sought health.

At the time, medicine had no real treatment for tuberculosis, the infectious bacterial disease that was killing my grandmother as it had many others. The best that doctors could offer were tales about the bracingly clean air of the Rockies or the dry heat of the desert, said to restore enfeebled lungs. A 1913 survey found that more than half the residents in El Paso, Colorado Springs, Denver, Albuquerque, Tucson, and Pasadena traveled west because they, or someone in their family, had TB.

So my father and his parents began their odyssey on a well-worn path when they followed Route 1 from New Jersey south to Georgia, where they'd connect with Route 80 for the drive west. In the 1930s, Route 80 was one of just three roads running from the Atlantic to the Pacific. As the southernmost of the three—it was called the Dixie Overland Highway—80 was the best for travel in winter. A 1931 pamphlet put out by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Bureau of Public Roads bragged that nearly a third of the road's 2,671 miles were "paved with brick, concrete

is, until Route 1 turns right to head out of town. It is here that we have the first felicitous find of our journey cross-country—a vintage neon sign announcing the Horseshoe Restaurant. Inside we find a counter where, some 80 years ago, this former blacksmith shop first started serving food to the farmers bringing their tobacco to market. By the mid-1930s, the Horseshoe was doing boffo business with tourists traveling Route 1. It hasn't changed much, except for an updated menu offering foodie diner options such as bison burgers and fried pickles. We order freshly battered onion rings, choose a dessert from a dozen pies, and find ourselves beaming at the thought that we may be eating dinner where my dad and his folks once ate theirs.

Harder to find will be the places where my father and his parents slept. One night they would have a "fine cabin," according to my grandmother's journal. The next might end with a flat tire. "Fixed the tire," she writes, "then got in a miserable Tourist Court, but it was too late to do anything else." Tourist courts, typically a clutch of cabins arrayed around a semi-circular drive, were precursors to motor hotels, or motels, and only a few have made it into the 21st century. The few we'll see on our trip have been abandoned or converted into sketchy weekly rentals, the sorts of places where stoves are more likely to be cooking meth than dinner.

Across the Carolinas and into Georgia, much of Route 1 is a rural two-lane back road. It gives us a feel for the people, the land, and how the two interact. Speeding along the freeway, we may not have noticed the carpets of rust-colored needles under broad stands of pines. Or the tidy houses, even the most modest of which has an impeccable groomed lawn. Impeccable, except for what look like scraps of white paper. "That's so odd," my father says. Then we pass a tractor pulling a wheeled cage stuffed with freshly picked cotton.

On the highway we also would not have found the sort of lunch we stumble on in Georgetown, Georgia. It isn't the trimmed boxwoods out front that catch our attention but the dirt parking lot packed with cars. Inside we find locals crowding up for the daily buffet, a smorgasbord of fried

chicken, okra, black-eyed peas, collards, and corn pudding.

AT FIRST I'M NOT SATISFIED with Grandma Lorrie's journal. Rare are the moments she lets the veil slip, exposing honest emotion. The dismay at seeing her treasured furniture carted off in a beer wagon is the closest she comes to an outburst. She not only refuses to complain or vent; she never once mentions the disease killing her. Yet over time I begin to appreciate her reticence, however prim it may seem in our age of (over)sharing.

I'm keeping my own journal of the trip, though after ten hours in the car, sitting back down to write notes proves a chore. Then I think of how tired Grandma Lorrie would have been after a day banging across 400 miles of indifferently paved



Young visitors at Vicksburg's annual Riverfest sport face paintings. Postcards and ferry tickets gathered in Mississippi adorn a page (opposite) in Lorrie Felten's journal.

or bituminous macadam." The rest, my grandparents discovered, was gravel, clay, or "graded and drained earth," otherwise known as dirt. This, more than the tire technology of the day, may have caused the flats my grandfather had fixed along the way. The flats are detailed, along with much else, in a journal my grandmother kept. It now is our guide as we retrace their trip.

IT'S GOTTEN DARK, and Dad and I still have a few hours before we reach Southern Pines, North Carolina, where he and his folks spent the second night of their trip. (Their first was in Alexandria, Virginia, which we skipped.) We're approaching the tobacco town of South Hill, Virginia, and though it's still early in the evening, the sidewalks are already rolled up. That

Town of Court but it was too late for anything else. Next morning started but had another flat, so had to buy a new tire in Selma. Also



Tokens

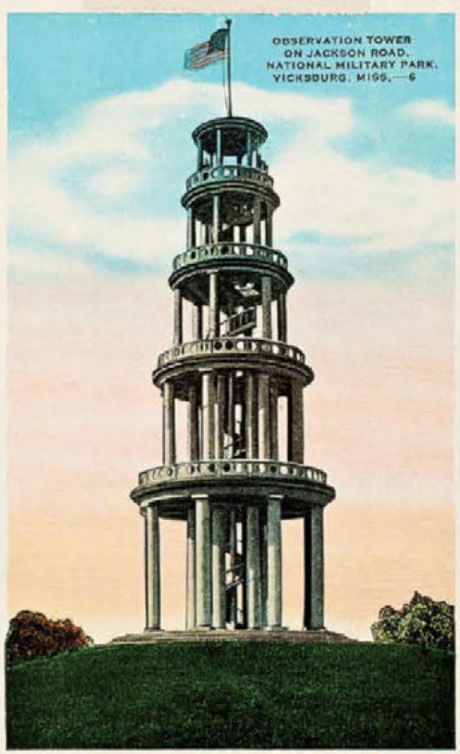


where we had breakfast while we waited for them to change the tire.

That night we reached Vicksburg Miss. This city is very interesting historically and is built on quite a steep series of hills.

We stayed in Abe Lincoln's Court a very nice place. The owner was dressed as Lincoln, even had a natural black beard and boots.

We rode around the battlefield next morning, which is now a beautiful park for



of monuments. It was too foggy to see much.

Both Lesters climbed part way up this one. We then crossed the muddy Mississippi on a wooden burning-back wheeler, the "George Miller". This was interesting but because of the fog we couldn't see the banks.

This is really "cotton" country and one plantation after another. I suppose these were the sho

Saguaros, native to Arizona, signal the approach to Phoenix. U.S. Route 80 once teemed with motels, such as the now closed Palomino (opposite).



road—a weariness that never showed in her penmanship. My notebook is a tangle of clumsy, impatient scribbles. My grandmother’s journal is written in the sort of elegant hand that once was typical of anyone with a grade-school diploma.

In one entry that intrigues me, she writes of how they paused for several days in Hazlehurst, Georgia, at her Uncle Herman’s farm. When the time came to leave, she notes, “We felt we must push on. We felt so uncertain about the future and wanted to get it settled.”

For all the uncertainty, my grandparents had the gumption to take a side trip south into Florida, to what was, in an era before Disney, one of the state’s top tourist attractions: Silver Springs Park (now Silver Springs State Park), north of Orlando, site of one of the biggest artesian-spring formations on Earth.

My father and I make it to Silver Springs on a very chilly day for Florida. The park is deserted, its pavilions, built in the 1960s, eerily empty of people. Two glass-bottomed boats float tethered to the dock; a captain waits with each.

Shaking hands with Captain Oscar Collins, my dad tells him, “I was here 77 years ago,” adding that he remembers riding in a glass-bottom boat and seeing fishes, turtles, and alligators in what was then a crystalline, spring-fed lagoon.

“Wow,” says Collins, “I’ve only been here 44.”

We buy our tickets for his cruise, and the boat wheezes out into the lagoon. About the only things we see in the water are algae and grass, though at one point a cormorant glides under our vessel looking fruitlessly for fish.

WE HAVE BETTER LUCK in Vicksburg, Mississippi, into which we barrel after a ten-hour drive northwest from Silver Springs. Site of a decisive Civil War battle in which Union forces first laid siege to, then defeated, Confederate forces, the town sits where old Route 80 meets the Mississippi River.

“We stayed next to the battlefield,” my father tells me, “at Abe Lincoln’s Tourist Court.” It is long gone.

“A very nice place,” my grandmother wrote of the quirky lodging. “The owner was dressed as Lincoln, even had a natural black beard and boots.”

My father and his parents drove around the nearby battlefield, studying the monuments—at least those they could make out. “It was too foggy to see much,” the journal states.

Dad and I have better visibility. After a rainy morning, the clouds have cleared, and Vicksburg National Military Park gleams, the sun brightening the marble and granite obelisks, memorial temples, and plinths. We climb the 47 steps of the

Continued on page 88



PHILLY ORIGINALS

*Retooling a city:
Meet a new generation of butchers,
bakers, and candlestick makers*



BY LAUREN McCUTCHEON • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHERINE KARNOW

PHILADELPHIA has always been a city of makers. What began in colonial days as a grid of workshops between the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers in southeast Pennsylvania would grow to include factories, row houses, skyscrapers, and, eventually, suburban sprawl. Then came the second half of the 20th century—and urban flight from many American cities. Manufacturing left Philadelphia. Residents followed. Once beloved buildings stood vacant. Weeds grew in historic Washington Square. Decades passed. Then, in the late 1970s, creative folks and urban planners began to see opportunities in the many abandoned spaces. Artists, chefs, designers, tinkerers, brewers, and builders eager to ply their trades more affordably moved in, sparking Philly's revival. Recently, as other cities have lost their artisan class, these makers have stuck around—multiplied, even—helping make Philadelphia the vibrant, entrepreneurial place it is today.

Locals know to arrive early at Artisan Boulanger Pâtissier (top left) for its golden croissants and other pastries. Sartorialist Walé Oyéjidé (top right) often works from home with his two-year-old daughter by his side. Ellen Yin (lower left) heads longtime favorite Fork, in Old City. Waffle cones (lower right) wait for scoops at the Franklin Fountain.



Michelle Lipson
WORKER IN WOOD

Affluent Philadelphians in the 18th century frequently posed for portraits beside their newly made furnishings. Stately pieces—Queen Anne desks, Chippendale chairs made with cherry and walnut wood—hailed from small workshops in Old City and Society Hill. Today those neighborhoods command rents that are too high for most artisanal pursuits, so woodworkers have carved studios from former industrial sites on the city's edges. Some work out of warehouses big on space and small on overhead; Michelle Lipson's woodshop was once a coffin factory. Like the William Saverys, Thomas Afflecks, and other Philadelphia cabinetmakers of yore, these modern-day woodworkers embrace the aesthetic of their time. For Lipson that means slender tables, desks, and media centers that riff on 1950s styles and reflect the refined tastes of her word-of-mouth clientele. "Making things is like problem solving to me," she says. Her first foray into the

trade was building straw-bale houses. This was followed by apprenticeships with revered Pennsylvania furniture makers Bob Ingram and Jack Larimore. These days, Lipson is as apt to use her hand tools as much as her computer-driven new cutting machine, and she teaches the trade to hobbyists. "People want to be in touch with how things are made," she says. "They want to be handy."

■ MICHELLE LIPSON WOODWORKING, 3211 CEDAR ST.

Nancy & Bill Barton
BEER PIONEERS

Beer is proof God loves us and wants us to be happy." Philadelphia statesman and inventor Benjamin Franklin never actually said this, but it's no wonder Philadelphians continue to think he did. A century ago, Philly was the beer-brewing-est city in the Western Hemisphere. Today, Nancy and Bill Barton are part of a new generation of beer makers who are making their sudsy mark on the city.



Stephen Bilenky (above) builds custom bicycles in Olney. The Philadelphia Brewing Company (right), part of a new generation of brewers, occupies a restored 19th-century brewery. Michelle Lipson (far right) poses with a walnut chair she fashioned.



Their Philadelphia Brewing Company joins Yards, Victory, Flying Fish, Dock Street, Saint Benjamin, and a dozen other brewers whose indie logos appear on taps citywide. Every Saturday afternoon, the Philadelphia Brewing Company offers tours of its restored 19th-century brewery, which include free samplings of beers (try the Harvest from the Hood pale ale, made with neighborhood-grown hops). Ben Franklin, who really did state, “A penny saved is a penny earned,” would have wholeheartedly approved.

■ PHILADELPHIA BREWING COMPANY, 2440 FRANKFORD AVE.

Stephen Bilenky **BICYCLE BUILT FOR YOU**

Most of the machines at Stephen Bilenky’s out-of-the-way Olney shop are, he says, “World War I technology.” This native of Northeast Philly began building bikes in 1983, back when customer requests came via snail mail, a one-man brazing shop was an American anomaly, and “tandems were

made mostly in Europe,” he says. Today, his Bilenky Cycle Works employs six workers and Bilenky is esteemed as a veteran in a field of hundreds. His specialty is one-of-a-kind frames—recumbent, cyclo-cross, retrofit, hand-pedal, or longtail (extended in back to carry cargo)—for nonstandard bodies and lifestyles. He has built bikes for father-son triathletes Dick and Rick Hoyt, a Seattle Symphony member and her violin, and two Norwegian mail carriers. To such cyclists, Bilenky is a legend. He remains, however, nearly anonymous in his hometown, where city bicycle lanes still struggle for respect and a bike-share program has yet to launch (plans are for sometime in 2015). This may be due in part to Bilenky’s price point: His cycles start at around \$3,000 and can exceed \$15,000. “Our methods,” he explains, “do not lend themselves to mass production.” Then again, he relishes any chance to refurbish a classic Schwinn or a vintage Miyata. His simple philosophy: “Bikes need to be decent, serviceable machines. Bikes should last 50 years.”

■ BILENKY CYCLE WORKS, 5319 NORTH SECOND ST.



Eric & Ryan Berley

HISTORICALLY SWEET

The chocolate drops in one of the antique glass jars at the old-timey Shane Confectionery look like unwrapped Hershey's kisses. They aren't. They're Wilbur buds, the once famed product of a sweets factory up the street in Old City, a relic of the days when candymaking ranked as a major Philadelphia industry—before mass snack production put an end to that. Almost. Shane, the country's oldest continuously run sweets store, is one of the few confectioners that remain (others include Lore's, on Seventh Street, and Blasius, in Kensington). Thanks go to brothers Ryan and Eric Berley. Already well-known for creating the Victorian-inspired Franklin Fountain ice-cream shop next door, they bought the candy business in 2010. "The place needed freshening up," says Eric. They took 18 months to renovate the space, with its tin ceilings and yellow pine floors. Their aim wasn't to modernize but to revive "the candy store that once was," says Eric. They still use the upper floors to make classic Philly buttercreams in a two-ton, 1920 machine built for that purpose, and employ more than a thousand antique molds for Easter chocolates. Nods to contemporary tastes include scented marshmallows, honey lavender caramels, and



Anna Bario and Page Neal display their ethically mined gems.

the new "drinking chocolate" café. One more concession to contemporary habits: an online retail site where fans can order the candy shop's brandied cherries and nonpareils for delivery right to their door.

■ SHANE CONFECTIONERY, 110 MARKET ST.

Anna Bario & Page Neal

GLOBAL SMITHS

Jewelers' Row, basically a few blocks that form a capital I along Sansom Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets, has dibs as the first diamond district in the U.S. But a few blocks to the south, *bijoutières* Anna Bario and Page Neal are forging a shining first of their own. In 2007 the pair adopted an eco-friendly and ethical platform: The precious metals and stones in their jewelry are either responsibly mined or recycled. "We wanted to have a positive impact as far as manufacturing," says Bario. In 2014 they began acquiring their gold sheets through the Alliance for Responsible Mining, which works with small South American co-ops. "We know the miners' work conditions, we know the health conditions, we know the environmental conditions," Bario notes. A portion of the miners' fee is reinvested in community building. Bario and Neal give the same careful consideration to stones, especially diamonds. "Engagement rings, wedding bands—that's where some people first care about sourcing," says Bario. "After all, the rings will be worn every day for a lifetime."

■ BARIO NEAL, 700 SOUTH SIXTH ST.

Ellen Yin

RESTAURATEUR EXTRAORDINAIRE

When Ellen Yin was studying for her M.B.A. in health-care management at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, the buzzword of the day was "continuous improvement." After 17 years in hospital management, Yin left for restaurant ownership—and brought the concept with her. Fork, her first venture, consistently ranks as one of Philadelphia's (and the country's) foremost dining spots. Yin opened the American bistro when Old City was just getting on the map for its gallery scene. She engaged the talents of area artists, including a server who is still employed there, to create an approachable, elegant atmosphere: velvet drapes, abstract art, hand-painted lampshades, and, instead of a sign, a doorway mosaic. Her kitchen, now helmed by chef Eli Kulp, exploited local talent, too, sourcing ingredients from area farmers, butchers, and cheesemakers. "We were farm-to-table before the term was coined," said Yin. Last year, the entrepreneur expanded operations next door, offering breakfast through dinner in the casual, bread-centric High Street on Market. A few months later, she and Kulp took over operations at Rittenhouse Square's ambitiously modern a.kitchen and a.bar, which have ingredients grown to spec and set their tables with Philadelphia-made pottery and woodwork. "It's either make it better, or quit," says Yin.

■ FORK RESTAURANT, 306 MARKET ST.; HIGH STREET ON MARKET, 308 MARKET ST.; A.KITCHEN + BAR, 135 S. 18TH ST.



Brothers Ryan and Eric Berley churn out pumpkin buttercream, a filling for chocolates, in the upper loft of Shane Confectionery.

Christopher Kears
CULINARY ARTIST

The short list of iconic Philly foods isn't exactly filled with haute cuisine. Hoagies, soft pretzels, scrapple, Tastykakes, and, yes, cheesesteaks are instead results of a working-class demand for fast, inexpensive fare. That demand endures. Today, however, there's a converse call for more refined menus, a call answered both in chef-driven empires—*Iron Chef* Jose Garces oversees about a dozen local restaurants—and singularly focused upstarts. Passyunk Avenue's two-year-old, 30-seat Will fits the latter category. Owned by Christopher Kears, the French BYOB bistro has become known for its impeccably plated, locally sourced seasonal French fare (don't miss any version of duck, or soups poured at the table). But it's also known for the chef himself. Kears was 16 when he became the victim of a drunk driving accident; his recovery has taken years. But that didn't stop him from graduating first in his class from the Restaurant School at Philly's Walnut Hill College and cooking at California's French Laundry and Chicago's Tru. At Will, Kears is not just cooking his heart out—he is hosting that way too. If you really need a two-top on a busy Saturday night, he says, "we can always fit you in."

■ WILL, 1911 EAST PASSYUNK AVE.

Walé Oyéjidé & Samuel Hubler
WORLDLY SARTORIALISTS

Sorry, kids. Historians now are questioning whether Philadelphia's Revolutionary War-era seamstress Betsy Ross was the first to stitch the Stars and Stripes. No one, however, questions who is in charge at the Afrocentric menswear line Ikiré Jones. Walé Oyéjidé and Samuel Hubler show their wax cottons quite literally on their sleeves, though their first collection of made-to-order suiting hid their signature West African prints inside tweedy exteriors. The business partners—Oyéjidé is an Afrobeat musician and former civil defense litigator; Hubler is a family-taught tailor and designer—use an Old World five-step soft-sewing process. "The fabric has international DNA," says Oyéjidé, who was born in Nigeria and grew up in Philly. "It comes from the Netherlands but is made for the West African market, where it has the same symbolism as Scottish clan tartans." Oyéjidé left a large law practice to launch the menswear label "in a deliberate attempt to realign my life with my values." Among those values: Telling a story and working at home, daughter Naima by his side. "I try to introduce other parts of the world in a way that is interesting," he says.

■ IKIRÉ JONES, IKIREJONES.COM

Ben Volta
MURAL MENTOR

Visiting all of the 3,600-plus public paintings created by the nonprofit Mural Arts Program poses a challenge. But the citywide collection—the largest of its kind in the U.S., founded 30 years ago as an anti-graffiti initiative—more than





Samuel Hubler and Walé Oyéjidé (above) work on their boldly patterned jackets. Chef Christopher Kearsé pours coconut vinaigrette (left) over a salad of fruit and flowers at Will. Ben Volta and students show off a mural they painted (below).



merits a departure from the beaten path. A walk through Center City reveals dozens of such works, variously created by students, at-risk young adults, and prison inmates who have been trained in painting, building, mural installation, and other skills by Mural Arts staff and volunteers. The murals that may best demonstrate the power of community art, however, reside in Philadelphia's farther reaches. Take Mantua. Just north of University City, it is a neighborhood in one of five Promise Zones designated for federal aid by the Obama Administration—and home to “Micro to Macro,” a colorful 12,000-square-foot study of the universe that graces the kindergarten-through-eighth-grade Morton McMichael School. Artist Ben Volta collaborated with seventh graders and their math and science teachers to imagine and make the work, which, from planning to unveiling, took more than a year. Students did much of the painting. The result is a vision that, says Volta, “goes into galaxies—and goes into atoms.” It also kind of gets under your skin. Right into your heart.

■ MURAL ARTS TOURS DEPART FROM VARIOUS CENTER CITY LOCATIONS.

Dan & Trish Fiorella SAUSAGE MAKERS

The scene that Luigi Fiorella oversees in his shop, Fiorella Brothers Sausage Company, has not changed since he founded the place in 1892. Fiorella—okay, a portrait of him—hangs above the original weight scales. It faces the same brass cash register, the same dumbwaiter—hemp rope still cranking—and the same marble and mosaic countertops that Fiorella used when he presided over the place. At age 19 Fiorella left his home in Foggia, southern Italy, joining the first wave of Italians to settle on Center City's southernmost edge. Fiorella's people weren't the first to live in the working-class neighborhood; the Swedes claim that distinction. But Italians were prolific builders, constructing row houses, churches, and the vibrant open-air Ninth Street market (the oldest of its kind in the United States). All still thrive. Dan Fiorella, Luigi's 65-year-old great-grandson, has worked in the family business for 44 years, first alongside his dad, later with his brother, and now with his wife, Trish. Under the youngest Fiorella's tenure, the shop has made updates—new refrigeration, a spotless kitchen. But when it comes to product, Dan Fiorella adheres to Luigi's original mission. “All we make is Italian sausage, in seven varieties. We make a hot sausage and a mild sausage, with fennel seed and without. We make a cheese sausage and a breakfast sausage. And we make a liver sausage, using the recipe of my great-grandmother.” Some things, it seems, cannot be improved upon.

■ FIORELLA BROTHERS SAUSAGE COMPANY, 817 CHRISTIAN ST.

Amanda Eap & Andre Chin EARLY RISERS

Heard of the city that never sleeps? It's not Philly. Bars and nightclubs close promptly at 2 a.m. Weekend mornings, locals tend to sleep in—except if they are fans

of Artisan Boulanger Pâtissier. On an unassuming corner of South Philly, neighbors have taken to rising early for the you'd-swear-you-were-in-France baguettes and pure butter pastries made by Andre Chin and Amanda Eap. Chin, a Paris-trained pâtissier, does the baking. Eap works the counter, fills pastries, makes specialty cakes, and crafts breakfast croissants, followed, later in the day, by Vietnamese hoagies known as *banh mi*. The two met in West Philly, at Eap's dad's doughnut shop, years after they'd separately escaped their native Cambodia—Chin, alone, to France, Eap to Pennsylvania with her family. Marrying, they moved to South Philly as young parents, taking a chance on a vacant storefront. For the first few years “we struggled,” Chin admits. But they hung on, watching as their Italian neighborhood filled with newcomers, who dubbed their new digs “East Passyunk.” When those newcomers started having families of their own, business took off. Chin calls the line out the door “gratifying.” Locals just call it necessary.

■ ARTISAN BOULANGER PÂTISSIER, 1218 MIFFLIN ST.

Lele Tran

COOPERATIVE CLOTHIERS

Used to be, when discriminating Philadelphians went clothes shopping, they headed to New York. No longer.

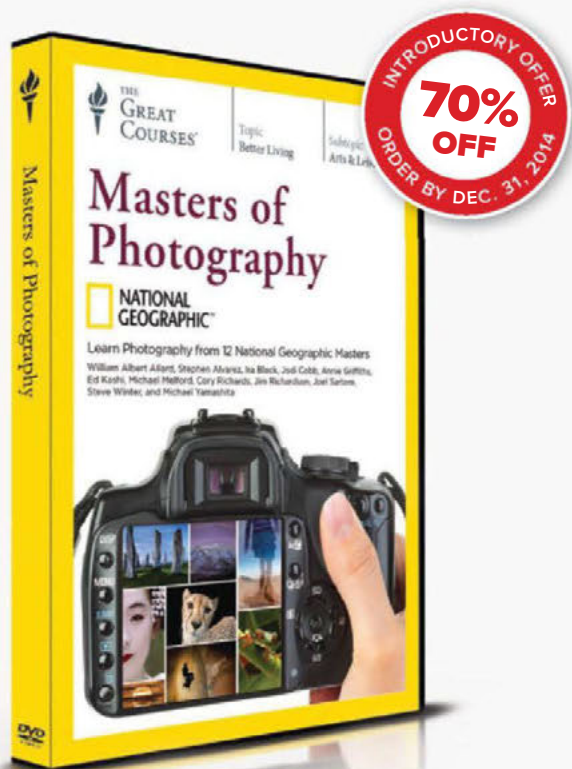
A little more than a decade ago, fashion retail worth talking about returned to Philly. Some observers attributed the retail revival to an improving economy. Others credited the growth of Urban Outfitters, headquartered in South Philly, or the intensified fashion-design programs of local universities. Then again, it could have been thanks to pioneering boutique owners such as Lele Tran, a dressmaker who opened an eponymous (and since closed) shop in Old City in 1997, right when the historic neighborhood was ready to embrace local style. Before long, more than a handful of vendors of vintage, independent, and international fashions appeared in Tran's wake. Today Tran is a professor at Philadelphia's Moore College of Art & Design. Concurrently, she has taken the making and selling of designer goods a step further: Three years ago she formed an all-local co-op, US*U.S. The space, which sits directly across from the Arch Street Meeting House, is small, but the made-in-America pieces, from frocks adorned with sequins to wool scarves that zip into endless shapes, are thoroughly on point.

■ US*U.S., 323 ARCH ST.

LAUREN McCUTCHEON is a features reporter who covers culture, food, and family at the *Philadelphia Daily News*. Contributing photographer CATHERINE KARNOW fell in love with Philly while shooting this story.



Lele Tran (center) and a group of other designers from the co-op US*U.S. gather in their shared storefront in Old City.



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THE INSIDER

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

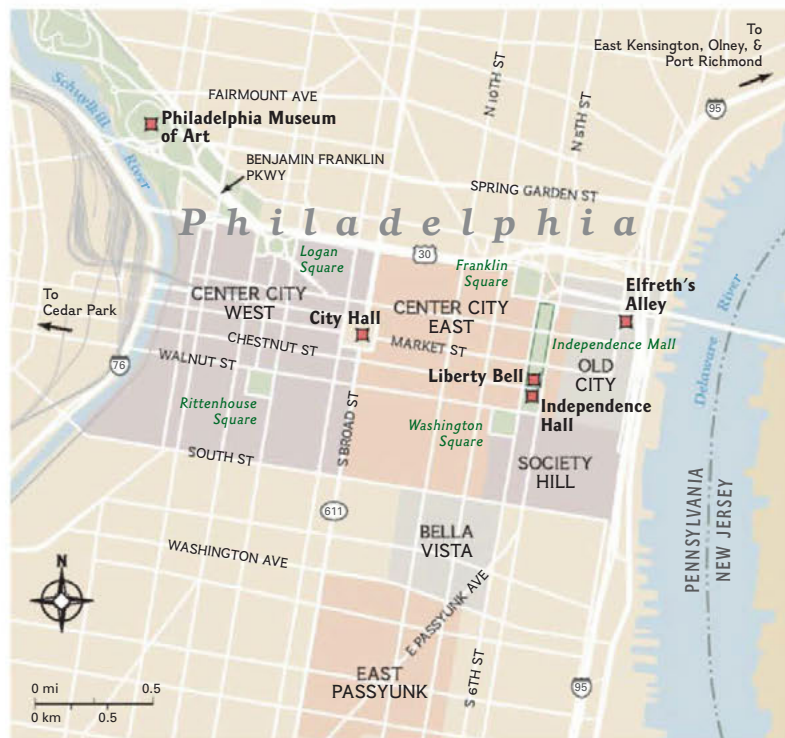
THE CITY WHERE the U.S. got its start is rich in history, for sure. But it also can brag about its art collections, science centers, and culinary spots—all destinations within walking distance of City Hall, the centermost point of Center City.

MUSEUMS EN MASSE

Locals compare the **Benjamin Franklin Parkway** to Paris's Champs-Élysées—a reasonable stretch, given its impressive museums. Book ahead to visit the **Barnes Foundation**, known for its collection of Cézannes, Renoirs, and Matisses arranged alongside African sculptures and French ironwork. The parkway runs from City Hall to the **Philadelphia Museum of Art**, where visitors like to run up the steps featured in the film *Rocky* before viewing the Eakins. (Gah 'head. Everyone does it.)

FOUNDERS TOUR

Independence Mall, today a national park, is where it all began. Or, at least, where it all got signed. The flat national park extends out from Independence Hall, where John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and 53 other brave fellows met to lend their John Hancocks to the document that would proclaim independence from King George III. Along the cobblestones of Chestnut Street are the **Liberty Bell**, with the crack that was caused by its clapper, and the remains of



George Washington's Philadelphia digs.

SOUTH PHILLY FARE

Fans of actor-director Sylvester Stallone's work will recognize **South Ninth Street** between Fitzwater and Wharton Streets as the place where Rocky

Balboa caught an apple during his famous run. Others may know the stretch as one of the oldest open-air markets in the nation. Don't miss: the endless cheeses and olives at **Di Bruno Brothers**, the truly odd meats at **D'Angelo Bros.**, the loaves of Italian bread at **Sarcone's Bakery**, and the house-made mozzarella at **Claudio**.

AUTHENTIC OLD CITY

Historic sites in downtown Philly include wee **Elfreth's Alley**, the onetime home of myriad makers, among them an African tailor, a German shoemaker, glassblowers, first lady Dolley Madison, and seamstress Betsy Ross. This neighborhood, which is home to the historic Episcopal **Christ Church** and the redbrick Betsy Ross

House, has become just as popular for its clutch of bistros, cafés, art galleries, and boutiques.

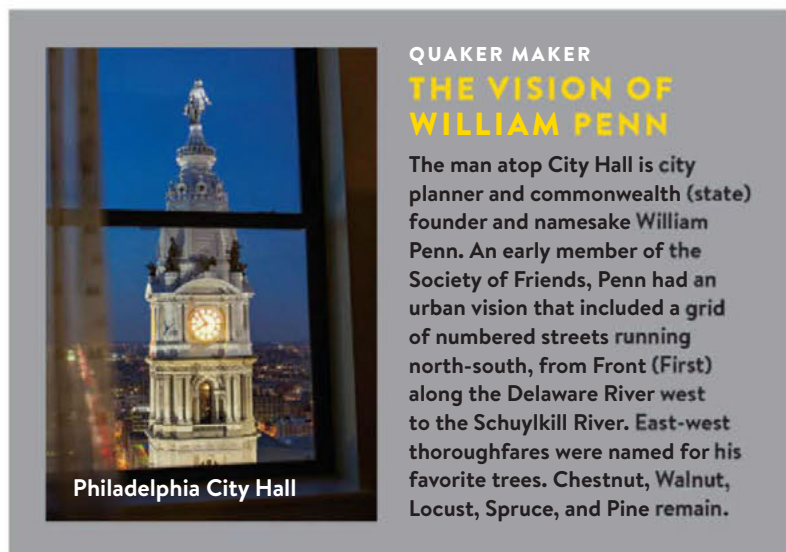
ATLAS



Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, founded in 1805, is the oldest art school in the United States.

The first U.S. patent was awarded to a Philadelphian, Samuel Hopkins, in 1790 for a new way of making potash.

One percent of all new construction in Philadelphia must be designated for public art.



Philadelphia City Hall

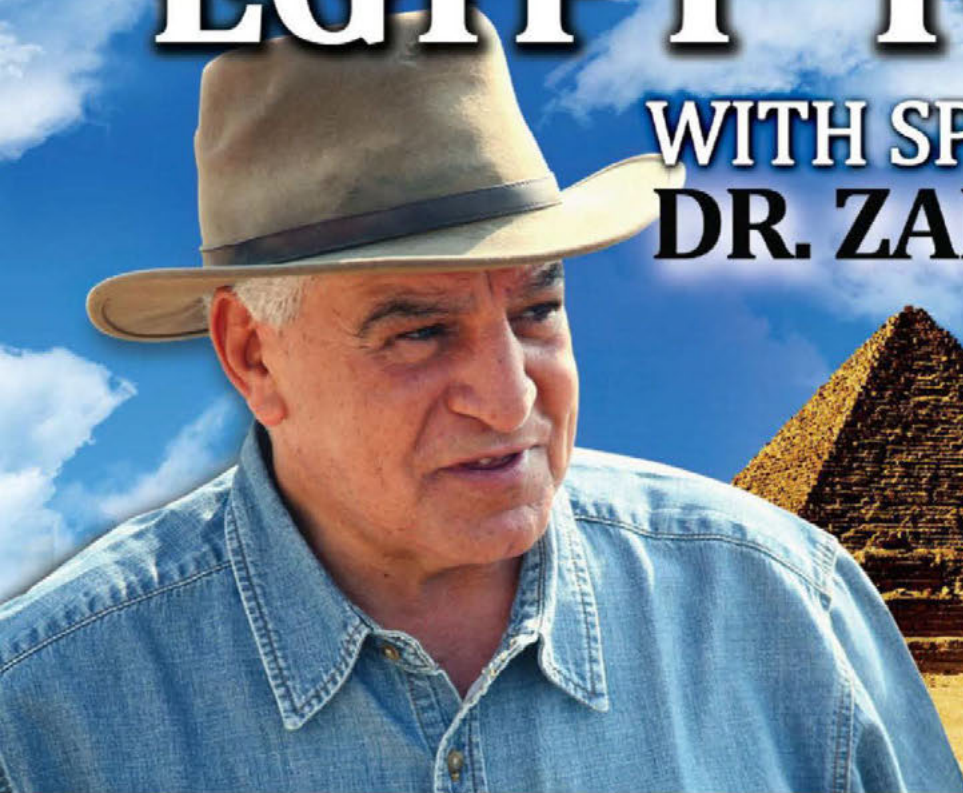
QUAKER MAKER

THE VISION OF WILLIAM PENN

The man atop City Hall is city planner and commonwealth (state) founder and namesake William Penn. An early member of the Society of Friends, Penn had an urban vision that included a grid of numbered streets running north-south, from Front (First) along the Delaware River west to the Schuylkill River. East-west thoroughfares were named for his favorite trees. Chestnut, Walnut, Locust, Spruce, and Pine remain.

EGYPT TOURS

WITH SPECIAL GUEST
DR. ZAHİ HAWASS



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November 1-14, 2015

2016:

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Group photo - February 2014 Egypt tour with Dr. Zahi Hawass.

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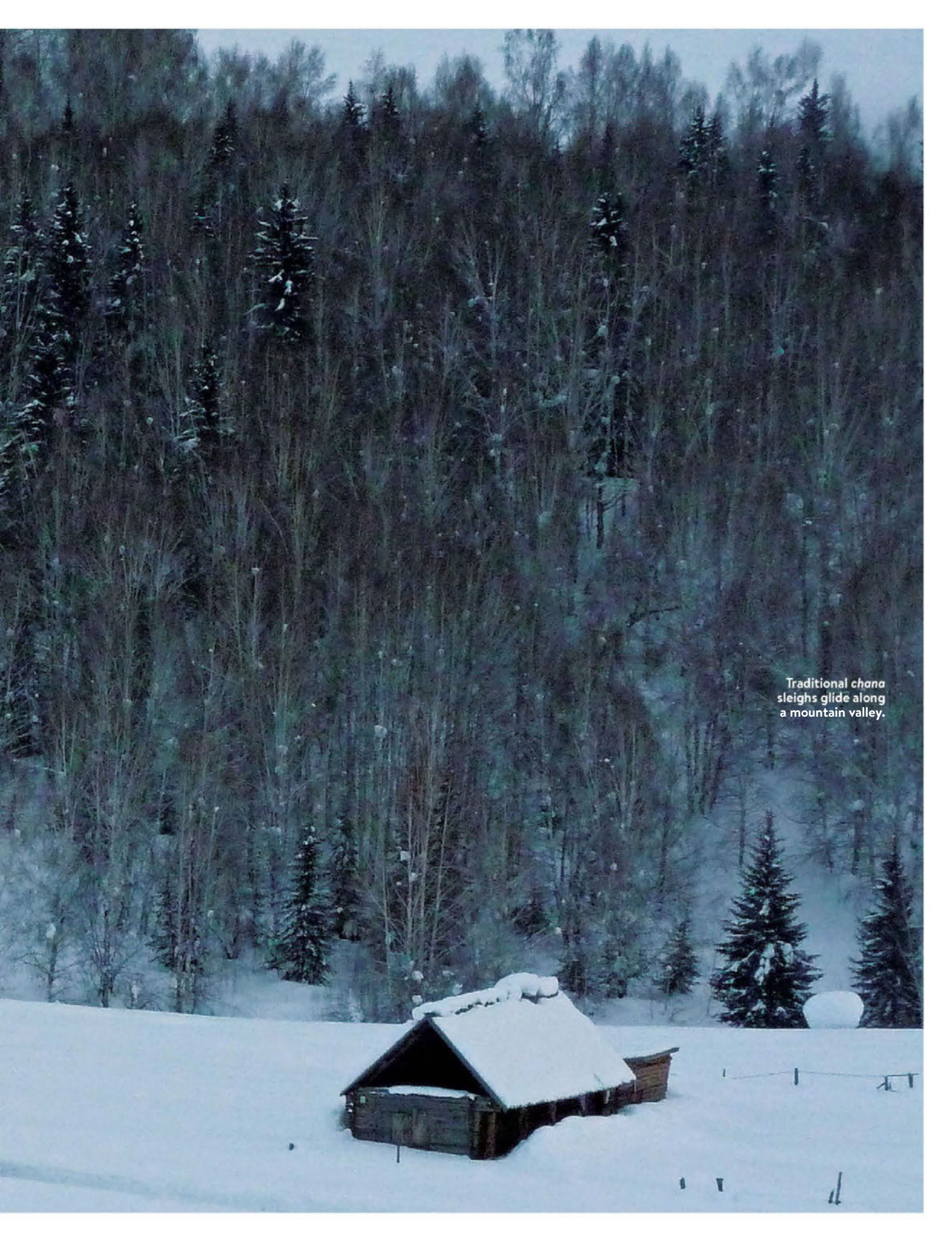
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A WINTER'S TALE

Impassable but not impossible: A horse-drawn sleigh ride through northwestern China's Altay Mountains

BY MARK JENKINS

A photograph of a small, rustic wooden cabin with a steep, snow-covered roof, situated in a snowy mountain valley. The cabin is surrounded by a dense forest of evergreen trees, some of which are heavily laden with snow. The ground is covered in a thick layer of snow, and the overall scene is serene and wintry. The cabin has a simple, rectangular structure with a dark wooden frame and a light-colored roof. A small, snow-covered evergreen tree stands to the right of the cabin. In the background, a dense forest of tall, thin evergreen trees covers a steep hillside. The sky is a pale, overcast blue.

Traditional *chana*
sleighs glide along
a mountain valley.



Skiing on boards, here covered with animal skin, may have originated in the Altay region millennia ago. Snow veteran, a horse (opposite) hauls a chana up an incline.

IT'S 35 DEGREES BELOW ZERO FAHRENHEIT, AND OUR HORSES DON'T GIVE A DAMN.

Large heads bowed, snow coating their thick hides, plumes of steam swirling from their frosted nostrils, they're primordial beasts genetically inured to intense cold. A wooden sleigh called a *chana* is attached to each horse by long pine poles and a curved yoke. The design of the sleigh—the width of a horse's ass, the length of a human body, with two curl-tipped runners—has not changed for centuries.

Our *chana* driver, Norbek, a rough-cut Kazakh as impervious to the cold as his horses, adjusts the leather straps with bare hands. He has loaded the two sleighs with our backpacks, cross-country skis, and sacks of hay for the horses. Bundled in down parkas, mittens, and insulated pants and boots, we are about to sled into the Altay Mountains of central Asia.

The Altay, an obscure range that is buried in snow all winter, rises at the converging borders of China, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and Russia. It may well be the last place on Earth where horse-and-sleigh, an ancient form of travel, remains the primary means of winter transportation.

Four of us are on this expedition: Norbek and I on one *chana*, Nils Larsen and Ayiken on the other. Larsen is an American ski historian who has traveled to the Altay nine times to research the origins of skiing. Shaggy-haired, soft-spoken, and a master skier, he lives in a century-old cabin outside of rustic Curlew, Washington, and owns a small ski company. Ayiken (pronounced I-kin) is our factotum, a rosy-cheeked Kazakh fluent in five languages who is as at ease with pinched-faced Chinese bureaucrats as with broad-smiling nomads. Our goal is Hemu, a village deep in China's northwestern province of Xinjiang, where Larsen is hoping to interview the last living members of a ski culture thousands of years old. To get there by *chana*, we must cross a mountain pass, then parallel the icebound Hemu-Kanas River. In summer, Hemu is a one-day journey by horseback. Now, in February, it will take much longer.

As we're about to set off from a settlement named Jaldungwe, a horseman gallops up to warn us that avalanches have closed the *chana* track to Hemu.

"He says it is impassable," translates Ayiken.

Norbek nods, his eyes squinting, his face snow-burned to leather from so many years of living in the elements. When the horseman departs, Norbek flicks the reins of his horse and we glide off over the snow. He knows these mountains and knows his horses, which quite possibly descend from Genghis Khan's own steeds, with coats dense as fur and tails so long, they drag at the hooves. The shaggy creatures pull our *chanas* in single file with muscled resolution, and considerable flatulence.

What first strikes me riding a *chana* is the lack of speed. The

horses are having to plod through deep snow, so we move just a little faster than a human walks. This allows plenty of time to take in the landscape. Beyond Jaldungwe we wind through groves of black-armed birch trees. As the trail steepens and the snow deepens, the horses begin to bog down. Then they stop. Norbek rolls off the lead *chana* into the waist-deep powder, struggles to slog to the front of his horse, flips its reins over one of his own shoulders, and starts to pull the 800-pound animal. Eager to please, the horse lunges forward like a wildebeest in deep water. Ayiken takes the reins of the second horse and plows ahead, his short legs lost in the drifts. Larsen and I push the 300-pound sleighs from behind. This is not easy. We flounder even worse than the horses, slipping and falling. Soon



we're covered with snow and sweating profusely. Nonetheless, with Norbek and Ayiken stomping forward yanking the reins as Larsen and I push, we manage to reach the top of the pass.

I'm getting a firsthand glimpse of winter life in this remote region without roads and automobiles. Only a few hours into our journey, my dashing-through-the-snow *Doctor Zhivago* illusions about *chana* riding have vanished. Horses here were the original automobiles, tamed, then bred—so, in a way, built—as beasts of burden by Norbek's ancestors. Archaeologists in fact believe one of the few places where wild horses survived the freeze of the last ice age was here on the Eurasian steppe, an expanse of grassland and taiga stretching for more than 3,000 miles, from the Altay Mountains to the Transylvanian Alps in Romania. In addition, recent evidence is suggesting the wild horse was domesticated approximately 6,000 years ago in this same region.

As our horses gulp down snow, Larsen and I unpack our skis, clip in, and slide off the back side of the pass, whooping

away. Norbek and Ayiken follow on the chanas. Though our skis are modern, as Larsen and I cut turns down through the trees, we echo the experience of the Altay Mountains' original skiers, faced as they were with months of powder.

The deeper we go into the landscape, the deeper the snow gets. Once again the horses begin to flounder. Norbek remains insouciant, as does Larsen—they have shared many a chana journey—but I begin to fear for our animals. Ayiken relays my concern to Norbek.

"He's afraid we may kill the horses."

Norbek, standing waist-deep in snow as he rocks a chana to unstick it, looks at me, shaking his head. Onward. Larsen and I



Altay skiers pole their way along a ridge in Xinjiang Province; wrapping their skis in skins provides traction for uphill climbs.

forge forward on our skis, stopping at each swath of avalanche debris to dig a route for the horses. At dusk the animals become so mired in a snowbank that Norbek has to unhitch the chanas and let the horses make their way through—which leaves him, with our pitiful help, dragging the sleighs.

The temperature has plunged below minus 40 degrees, the horses are encased in ice, and Norbek is utterly unperturbed. Larsen had bragged about Norbek's skills as a chana driver, but I quietly decide he's insane and our horses probably will die.

Norbek rehitches the chanas to the horses and we trudge onward into the gloaming. Night stars appear, illuminating the mountains in a pale, phosphorescent blue. Slipping along on my skis, I notice my fingers and feet have become cold but my core is warm. Surprisingly, that's good enough, just as it has been for Norbek and his ancestors for millennia. The four of us are traveling through a land using a method that belongs to a distant past. If we want to survive out here, we must keep moving. The realization bemuses me. Our situation is elemental, irreducible. No thinking is needed, only doing. I enter Norbek's mind, Norbek's reality. I must ski into the looming darkness without thinking. Nothing more. Acceptance of this soon will liberate me.

As if in return for my newfound sanguinity, we spot a tiny yellow light on the black horizon. It seems a mirage in the inky vastness, appearing and disappearing as we traverse dunes of snow. Drawing near, we see the light is emanating from a cabin. We're saved! A dog howls as a man in quilted pants appears in the blackness. We park our chanas and shake his hand. Inside the cabin, beyond the blanket-draped door, sit the man's bewildered wife and son. We stare at each other in mutual surprise. We can't believe our good fortune, and they can't imagine what the hell we're doing out here at night in the dead of winter.

Ayiken makes introductions. The man of the house, Womir Uzak—Ayiken explains this means "long life"—is short and wiry, with a crooked nose that looks like the result of a hoof to the face. His wife, Meir Gul, is a round-faced beauty. Their son, Janat, wide-eyed, with an even wider smile, looks to be 12 years old. Ayiken asks politely if we might spend the night.

"*Boladi, boladi. Sender bizdeng honahtar!*" Uzak says. "Of course, of course. You are our guests!"

It's past 10 p.m., but Meir Gul stokes the fire, sets a giant pot on the woodstove, fills it with meaty bones, and begins making noodles from scratch.

Outside, Uzak and Norbek unharness our horses. There is no horse barn; the animals are neither watered nor fed. They just stand, behemoths of stoicism. I want to invite them into the deliciously warm cabin. Our hosts, Ayiken learns, are caretakers of a herd of horses in the valley; all winter they shovel snow off the haystacks to feed them. Ayiken explains we're on our way to Hemu. Uzak nods and says, incidentally, "That route is closed because of avalanches." His manner is indifferent; because it's closed doesn't mean it's

impassable. All here is a matter of muscle and perspective.

Exactly an hour after our arrival, Norbek goes out and feeds the horses hay.

"If I give them water before I feed them after a hard day," he explains through Ayiken in a rare break from taciturnity, "they will bloat themselves and not eat."

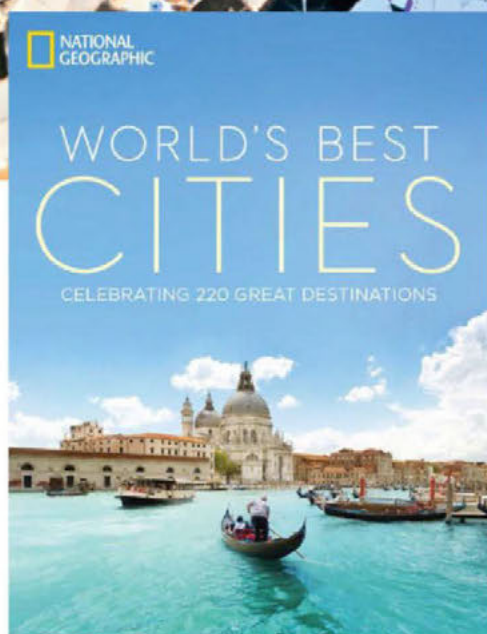


Around midnight, we all sit down to bowls of mare's yogurt, beef stew mixed with noodles, bread and jam. As I dig into the stew, Norbek heads out to give the horses water. He doesn't sweet-talk them or pet them or even break off the chunks of ice plating their shivering flanks. When I ask him if he shouldn't put a blanket on the horses, he shakes his head no.

Our bellies full, bodies exhausted, minds scrubbed clean of thoughts by a day in deep snow, we climb onto the wall-to-wall sleeping platform carpeted with rugs, which has more than enough space for our three hosts plus the four of us. I scooch down into my sleeping bag and sleep a dreamless sleep.

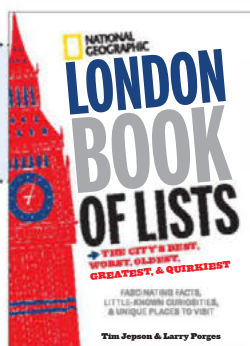
When my eyelids lift in the morning, Meir Gul already has the fire blazing and cups of milk tea steaming on the table. I step

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outside, fully expecting to find our horses frozen solid, iced sentinels that will stand before this cabin until the spring thaw. But the beasts still breathe; Norbek is slipping their halters back on and reattaching the chanas.

Uzak said that to reach Hemu we'd have to dig our way through this winter wonderland, so we hire him to help. He'll trot ahead, tromping out a track. Back into the wilderness we sleigh, away from our cabin of salvation. Meir Gul waves.

Larsen and I, eager to lighten the load of our horses, choose to ski; Ayiken and Norbek will drive the chanas. Wolverine tracks are everywhere; among the most elusive of animals, their presence here, Larsen says, suggests a fairly intact ecosystem.

We continue on, and soon the valley narrows. We know our way is about to be impeded. Sure enough, an avalanche has obliterated a section of the old chana track. Our horses pull up at the slide as at the banks of a raging river. Uzak unsheathes his shovel and goes to work. The four of us deploy our skis, chopping out snow on the high side to fashion a sort of platform. It's slow business. I calculate it'll take days to trench a path across this avalanche.

Methodically digging and shoveling snow, it dawns on me this is what the locals have been doing for centuries. I'm certain Norbek, Ayiken, and Uzak don't give it a second thought. If they want to get somewhere in winter—for supplies, for help, for conversation—they and their horse-drawn chanas are it. It doesn't matter how hard the work is or how long it takes. They have no choice.

Again, I find a gratifying freedom in this lack of options. We can't go up, down, over, under, or around, so we have to go through. Well then, dig. Not in frustration, not impatiently or angrily. Not with any emotion at all. I give my mind a rest and let my muscles do the work.

If we were stuck somewhere in my home state of Wyoming, an obstacle such as an avalanche would be identified by the older generation as an opportunity to "build character" and by the younger as "like, really unfair." Not to the Kazakhs of the Altay. They don't weigh obstacles down with emotional freight. Avalanches

and other impediments are part of the rhythm of the day. Altay people expect them without dwelling on them, take whatever effort and time is required to get through them, and move along.

To my surprise, within two hours we have shelled out a track through the avalanche debris. Naturally, around the bend, we find another avalanche, but by now I don't care. I'm getting the hang of this. The Zen of traveling by chana.

It is midafternoon when we reach another cabin and are invited in by the owners, a Kazakh family, for milk tea and fried dough. Outside the cabin, a solar panel is set in the snow. We are told

it can power a cellphone, two light bulbs for a few hours, and the toy electric crane I see on the floor. As we eat, the family's matriarch, seated by the woodstove, operates the controls of the small crane while a three-year-old boy with a traditional haircut—head shaved but for a tuft—tries to break the jerking toy. We are back in civilization.

The final leg of our journey to Hemu will be along a well-used chana track. If Larsen and

I stay on skis, we won't be able to keep up with the chanas, so we join Norbek and Ayiken on the hay bales. When we set off, the horses, now free of deep snow, practically gallop. The sun is slanting across the snow, and soon the chanas are gliding along as if on ice. Enchanting as this is after our labors, I'm finding it disappointingly uneventful. In Hemu there will be skiers using traditional wooden skis, but there also will be SUVs, even a plowed road—and I'm not ready. I want to remain in ancient Altay.

As the low cabins of Hemu come into view, blanketed with a flat gray cloud of woodsmoke, I find myself wishing we had another snow-covered pass to make our way across. I find myself yearning for more nights out in the unknown, for more miles of deep snow to traverse by horse and chana. And I find myself envying what Norbek and Ayiken have in their rugged homeland.

National Geographic contributing writer **MARK JENKINS** skied Yellowstone and climbed Devil's Tower for us in "America's Cathedrals" (October 2013).

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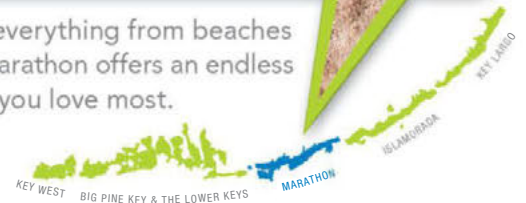


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THE MAGIC



A dramatic landscape photograph showing a massive, dark, and textured storm cloud hanging low over a flat, green field. The sky is dark and moody, with the cloud's underside showing intricate details of its structure. In the foreground, a few small, dark trees stand on the horizon line. The overall atmosphere is one of awe and power.

FIRST
PLACE

A storm cloud
in Colorado,
captured by
Marko Korošec

of THE MOMENT

WINNERS OF *TRAVELER'S* 26TH ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST



A STORM IN COLORADO. A vanishing lake in Austria. A volcano erupting in Ecuador. More than 18,000 photographers from 96 nations submitted images of these and other extraordinary scenes to *Traveler's* 2014 Photo Contest—confirmation of what photographer Steve McCurry says: “Sometimes a scene requires the camera to linger until ‘the moment’ enters the frame.”

FIRST PLACE

“INDEPENDENCE DAY” MARKO KOROŠEC

Slovenian meteorologist and storm chaser Marko Korošec photographed a brewing storm (opening pages) near Julesburg, Colorado, on the evening of May 28, 2013. “It reminded me of a scene in the movie *Independence Day*.” A tornado warning had been issued, but, Korošec says, “the storm never did produce one, just large hail and occasional funnel clouds. What impressed me about this formation was the beauty of its structure.” The road and retreating car add a sense of the storm’s scale as well as a human element. Korošec works for Slovenia’s Road Weather Information System and has photographed weather events for almost 20 years. “I’ve chased storms for 15.” His goal? “To be in the

best places at the right time, get those interesting moments, and share them.”

Prize: An eight-day National Geographic Expedition to Alaska’s Inside Passage for two

SECOND PLACE

“FIRST TIME” AGNIESZKA TRACZEWSKA

Photographer Agnieszka Traczewska was at a wedding in Jerusalem when she snapped her shot of the bride and groom (above). “The groom’s mother is leaving so that the two can be alone for the first time,” she says, adding that the couple had met only once, for 30 minutes, before she captured this scene. For five years, Traczewska has traveled to Israel from her home in Poland to photograph Orthodox Ashkenazi communities. “I try to record their traditions, as

well a human emotions in their intensities and extremes.” In this photo she wanted to “show the couple’s bottled-up excitement at being alone finally. The mother of the groom half-waves farewell and half-salutes a future life of happiness.”

Prize: A five-day National Geographic Photo Workshop in Santa Fe, New Mexico

THIRD PLACE

“DIVER IN A MAGIC KINGDOM” MARC HENAUER

Every spring, Grüner See, or Green Lake (opposite, top), grows tenfold when snow-melt floods its basin in Tragöss, Austria, covering trees and hiking trails. Upon hearing about the ephemeral lake, popular with area divers, Swiss policeman Marc Henauer wanted to dive it with his girlfriend, Isabel. He got his shot, featuring Isabel, “on our final day, when sunshine lit the scene and the tree’s leaves were visible. I love it because people think it’s not real.” What’s next? A trip to the Pacific island of Tonga. Prize: A six-day cruise for two on a Maine windjammer schooner.



MERIT AWARDS

The Sahara in **Algeria** (below) captivated **EVAN COLE**, who lives in Australia. Intent on the best composition, he knew he had his shot when his Tuareg guide lay down on the desert sand. “It captures the color, pattern, and feel of the dunes,” he says. “My camera only had a view screen, so shooting in bright sunlight was a challenge. I’d take what I thought was a good shot and hope it would turn out. This did.”



DUOWEN CHEN photographed medieval **Český Krumlov** (below), a town in the Czech Republic, on a vacation from his architectural design studies in Italy. As he ascended a winding road to visit the fortified castle that overlooks the town, Chen paused when he saw this panoramic scene. “It had rained, and the town was suffused by light fog and mist, giving it a sense of mystery—and timelessness.”



Merit winners receive a \$200 gift certificate to B&H Photo, a matted framed print of the photograph entered in the contest, and *The Art of Travel Photography* DVD course from National Geographic and The Great Courses.



SUSIE STERN is our first contest winner to shoot a photo with an iPhone. A painter in Atlanta, Stern was exiting **London's Borough Market** when someone exclaimed, "A wedding party!" Stern turned to see these women in dresses eating ice-cream cones. "I walked by, my iPhone ready. I had three seconds to get this shot," she says. "When I looked at it later, I couldn't believe I captured the serendipity of the moment."



Boston University student **SEAN HACKER TEPER** and some friends were in **Baños, Ecuador**, where they'd heard about a local attraction: the "End of the World" swing. As they took turns on the swing, Tungurahua volcano started fuming. "We were unaware Tungurahua was even active," Teper says. "Then it began to erupt as the sun was setting. The combination of the swing, the lighting, and the volcano made for an unforgettable moment for all of us."



For their honeymoon, South African **BYRON INGGS** and his wife chose a three-day horseback ride through Sehlabathebe National Park, in neighboring Lesotho. "One day, after we dismounted, our horses celebrated by rolling on their backs," Inggs says. Since he was using a wide-angle lens, he had to get close to this horse to make this shot. "Knowing the horse was moving a lot, I was concerned about getting a hoof to my body. Luckily, I instead grabbed this."

MAHESH BALASUBRAMANIAN, a software professional in India, was at a festival in a **Tamil Nadu** village when he saw this boy (right) having makeup applied to resemble Kali, the Hindu goddess of time and death. "I was intrigued by the innocence of his face," says Balasubramanian, "paired with the deep blue and red paint."

It was in the Burmese temple city of **Old Bagan** (below) that Brazil-born photographer **MARCELO CASTRO** came upon this moment in a pagoda. "I loved the sunbeams illuminating the young monk. When he opened the book, reflecting the light onto his face, I took some shots. This was the winner."

**ON THE
WEB**

View more contest entries in our online photo galleries at traveler.nationalgeographic.com.



Cross-Country Road Trip

Continued from page 61

Illinois Monument, topped by a small, domed pantheon in which even hushed voices reverberate. Dad startles me with an irreverent yawp, "to see how long the sound persists." We spend hours at the park but see only a fraction of its statues and markers. The triumphant bronzes that populate the Northern lines where Union troops arrayed themselves—such as the Minnesota Memorial's serene goddess of peace—give way to restrained memorials to Southern forces.

We come into Minden, Louisiana, on U.S. Route 80, which wants to bring us to the center of Main Street. But vendor tents block the way. We catch the strains of an oompah band competing with the calliope racket of a carnival midway, and decide to park. Minden was settled by German immigrants, and we've stumbled onto what looks like a Fasching festival. However, this being Louisiana, it also celebrates Mardi Gras. We spot a local Mardi Gras krewe decked out—women and men—in studded, sequined tailcoats.

It doesn't take long for my father to chat up the Duchess of Prosperity, regaling her with tales about our journey. Then we stuff ourselves with bratwurst and sauerkraut from the local boosters at the Civitan trailer, marveling at Minden's cultural mash-up.

I'm lucky to see my parents twice a year, usually at their home in Phoenix, where I was raised, or Washington, D.C., where I live. The visits tend to be hectic, filled with activities and not geared to leisurely conversations. But out here, on the road, the talk flows as Dad shares story after story from his life: How as a boy he got in trouble for eating canned beans with hobos who were camped by the creek. How, during World War II, German prisoners of war from nearby Camp Papago Park would march past his Phoenix home on their way to work in local fields. How the hedge in front of the old post office in downtown Phoenix was planted by my grandfather.

When my father and grandparents made it to Dallas, they had trouble finding even a basic tourist court: The town was filled with people visiting the 1936

Texas Centennial Exposition. Crowds still flock to the Centennial fairgrounds for the annual Texas State Fair, but when we stop in on a quiet Sunday, there is hardly a soul to be seen. We stroll by dry fountains and take in the audacious art deco architecture of the park, with its machine age statuary and moderne murals depicting heroic strides in art, science, and society. The commotion of the '36 exposition tired my grandmother, but she rallied to stand in line so they could write their names in the massive visitors' tome, *The Golden Book of Texas*, on page 5,154, column 5, line 95.

Heading west out of Dallas, what is left of U.S. Route 80 becomes strips and snippets of access roads running parallel to Interstate 20. We give in and join the interstate traffic, crowded by semitrailer trucks that are piled high with oil-rig piping. After a little while, we decide to escape to the narrow rural roads of West Texas. Tumbleweeds spill from the vast Chihuahuan Desert, an expanse empty except for the many workers who are tending the tireless oil derricks of the present-day petroleum boom.

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Felten father, son, and childhood bunny

South of Pecos, we put the dust of oil fields behind us and climb into the Davis mountains. Stands of gold-leaved cottonwoods frame craggy bluffs. Pulling into historic Fort Davis, an Old West cross-road, we find what for thousands of miles has eluded us—an honest-to-goodness tourist court, the Stone Village Tourist Camp. My father and I are giddy to be standing in front of this missing piece of our journey. The compound, built in 1935 with rocks, adobe, and logs, includes nine rooms in cabins, separated by old carparks that have been converted into screened “camp rooms.” We take a cabin, which is what my grandparents would

have chosen, now restored to its original charm with hardwood floors and a cedar ceiling by owners Randall and Belinda Kinzie, who have done much of the restoration. My father has to duck his head not to hit our cabin’s low doorway.

“I didn’t have to worry about that last time, when I was six,” he says, laughing.

The next morning we’re up early and off to El Paso, where, my grandmother notes, the family took a jaunt across the border to Juárez. “Very disappointing,” she writes of what at the time was a thriving tourist trap.

Dad decides we should press on to Phoenix, our end point, cruising the six hours across New Mexico. As the landscape of buttes and basins unfolds, I think of how alien this drive through the desert Southwest must have seemed to my New Jersey grandparents. Now that same terrain, so familiar to me, is the sign that we’re almost home. Phoenix is where my grandfather would find work playing the trombone.

“By good luck,” Grandma Lorrie says on a page late in her journal, “we met Clyde Lockwood of the Riverside Ball-

room. Lester got a job in his orchestra.”

They found a house in the desert, one of the well-ventilated half-canvas affairs recommended for “lungers,” the unkind term coined for tuberculosis refugees. With their cross-country odyssey ended, and with grandmother’s health failing, her journal gradually trails off. The dry Arizona desert proved to be no cure: Lorrie lived only 20 more months.

I turn and look at my father as we roll toward Phoenix. To reach the city, he and his parents, in the family Chevy, had to billy-goat their way along a mountain road outside the mining town of Globe.

“I confess to some nervousness,” my grandmother penned of the harrowing route. “Little Les cried all the way up.”

The road has long since been replaced by a modern highway—and as we hurtle down into the valley, my dad is smiling.

ERIC FELTEN leads the Eric Felten Jazz Orchestra, which performs songs from the 1930s and ’40s; he plays trombone, taught to him by his grandfather Lester. Contributing photographer **AARON HUEY** walked across America in 2002.

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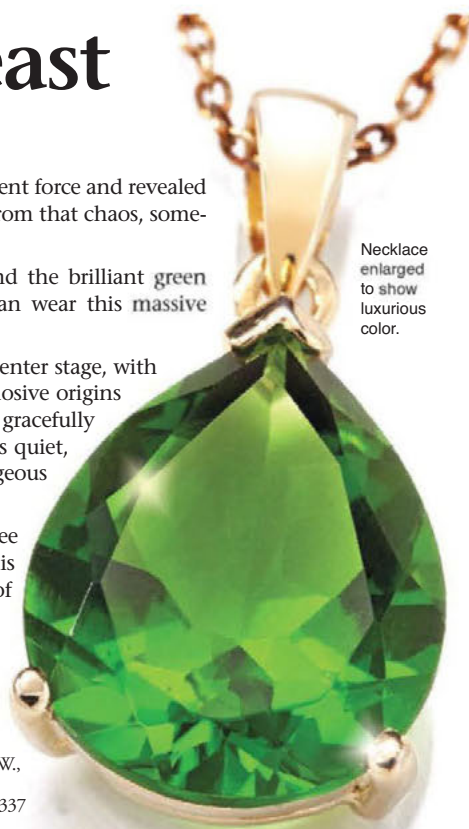
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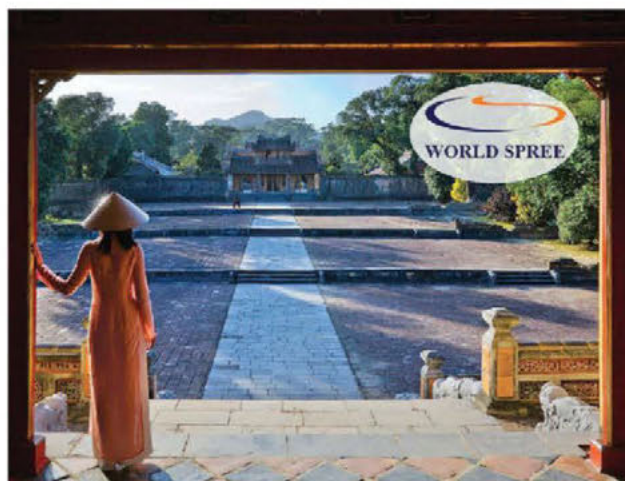


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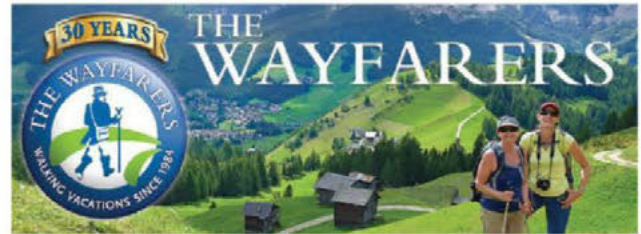
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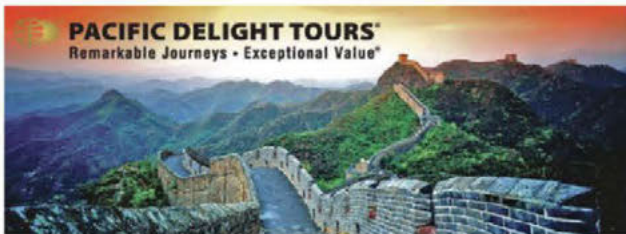
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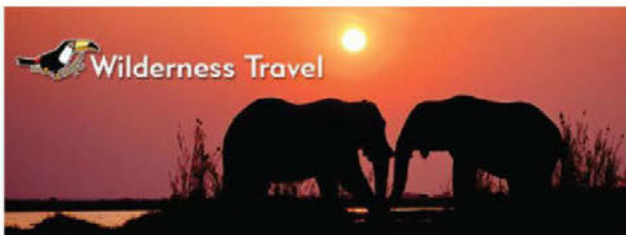
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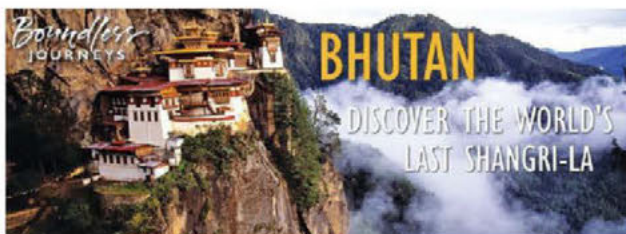
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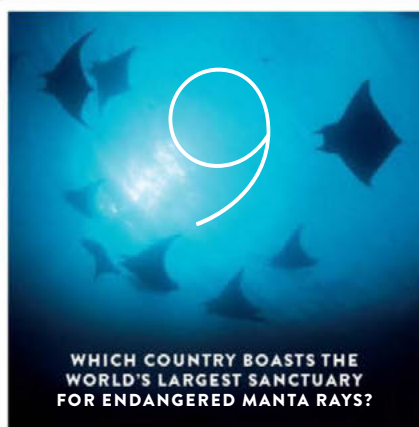
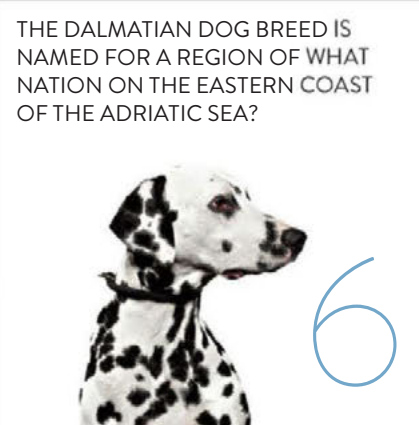
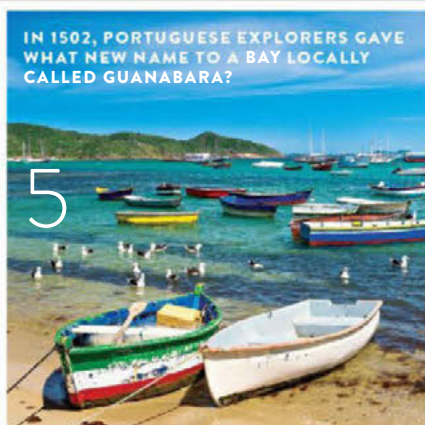
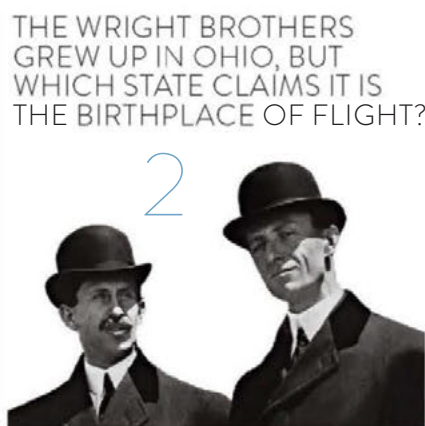
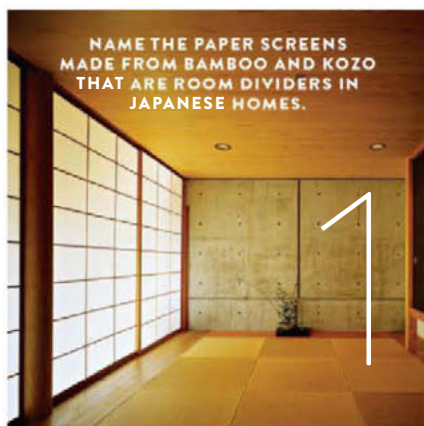
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By GEORGE W. STONE



ANSWERS 1. shoji 2. North Carolina 3. A Room With a View 4. Ecuador 5. Rio de Janeiro 6. Croatia 7. Bagan 8. cassoulet 9. Indonesia

2/AKIRA KAEDE/OCEAN/CORBIS (ROOM), BETTMANN/CORBIS (MEN), KEVIN CLOGSTOUN/GETTY IMAGES (RIVER), PHOTOGRAPHY/ISTOCKPHOTO (BANANAS), CATARINA BELOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK (BOATS), DANERGER/ISTOCKPHOTO (DOG), KUESHUTTERSTOCK (DISH), NORBERT WU/MINDEN PICTURES/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE (FISH)

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